

Leno did not push ball boy – Silva



Fulham boss Marco Silva

FULHAM boss Marco Silva insisted his goalkeeper Bernd Leno “touched” but “didn’t push” a ball boy during the Cottagers’ 3-0 defeat at Bournemouth.

The second-half incident occurred when Leno went to collect the ball from the youngster’s outstretched hand before using his own hand to make deliberate contact with the shoulder of the ball boy, who appeared to take a step back for balance.

Leno, who seemed to take issue with the speed at which the ball was being returned, and had already been booked, was subjected to a chorus of boos.

The 31-year-old German later returned to apologise to the boy for the encounter, though his manager was adamant the interaction had been exaggerated.

Silva said: “Have you seen him pushing? I didn’t see this. Yes, he apologised. I spoke with Bernd about it.”

“It’s clear he went to speak with the boy after that moment as the top professional that he is, the really experienced player that he is as well.

“He wanted to play quick. The ball boys, I don’t know who gave them instructions to hold always the ball to delay the beginning of the game again. OK, we are losing, he ran to the ball. I didn’t see him pushing.

“He touched the ball boy, he didn’t push the ball boy. They are different things, when you touch a ball boy or you push a ball boy. I am not English but I know the difference between one word and the other, and we have to say the truth in that moment.”

It was a low point of a frustrating afternoon for Silva’s men, as the Cherries extended their unbeaten run to seven.



Rasmus Hojlund broke his Premier League duck (Martin Rickett/PA)

Hojlund backed to go on scoring run

ERIK ten Hag expects Rasmus Hojlund to keep scoring after Manchester United’s £72million man finally broke his Premier League duck to seal a stunning 3-2 comeback win over Aston Villa.

United looked destined for a 14th defeat of the season in all competitions when Aston Villa scored twice in the space of six first-half minutes through John McGinn

and Leander Dendoncker to take a 2-0 lead in at half-time as boos rang around Old Trafford at the break.

But with INEOS director of sport Sir Dave Brailsford watching on after Sir Jim Ratcliffe’s minority stake-holding was confirmed, United rallied in the second half with Alejandro Garnacho scoring twice before Hojlund won it in the 82nd minute.

Although the summer signing from Atalanta finished as United’s top-scorer in their short-lived Champions League campaign, he had failed to find the net in 16 matches in domestic competition, but made no mistake eight minutes from time.

Ten Hag said of the 20-year-old Dane: “I’m sure now he has the first goal he will score more.”

Salah absence will be fine – Gakpo

By Carl Markham

Press Association Sport

LIVERPOOL’S Cody Gakpo is confident the forward line will step up to cover for the pending absence of Mohamed Salah.

Darwin Nunez ended a run of 12 matches without a goal, while Diogo Jota came off the bench to score after a month out injured in Tuesday’s 2-0 Premier League win over Burnley which took Jurgen Klopp’s side top of the table.

Salah has one more game – at home to Newcastle on Sunday – before he departs for the African Nations Cup with Egypt and the 16-goal winger is likely to be away for a month.

Therefore, Jota’s timely return boosts the numbers up top, while Nunez’s confidence has been lifted by his first Premier League goal since October.

Gakpo himself has seven for the season, the latest coming in



Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah

last week’s Carabao Cup romp against West Ham after he was denied a goal at Turf Moor when referee Paul Tierney adjudged Nunez to have committed a foul in the build-up, and he believes they have enough firepower to see them through in Salah’s absence.

“For every attacking player who didn’t score for a few games, it’s always nice to get back on the scoresheet and Darwin did it with a very good goal,” said Gakpo.

“For Diogo as well. When you are injured and you come back and score that’s always nice and good for the confidence. So really happy.

“Mo is gone after the Newcastle game so we need the goals. Of course, I think I can contribute even more.”

Liverpool captain Virgil Van Dijk is also of the opinion they can handle Salah’s expected lengthy absence despite the Egypt international being their main threat for so many seasons.

“It’s always important for the guys up front to score goals. I am delighted for Darwin.

“Diogo, it’s the same story. It’s good to see the boys back on the scoresheet,” said the Netherlands defender.

“I also want to say that Cody was outstanding, in the first half especially. It’s good to see.

“Everyone has to keep pushing each other.

“That’s the only way we can get better.”

Morris abuse ‘shameful’



ANYONE found guilty of racially abusing Luton’s Carlton Morris must face “the strongest possible consequences”, Kick It Out has said.

The 28-year-old striker complained about a comment made by the home crowd late on in the Hatters’ Premier League match against Sheffield United at Bramall Lane.

Luton boss Rob Edwards confirmed after his side’s 3-2 win that the matter had been reported to the police.

Kick It Out issued a statement on Wednesday morning which read: “We send our full support to Carlton Morris. It’s shameful that once again a player should be subjected to alleged racism while doing their job. Those who think this vile behaviour towards players is acceptable need to face the strongest consequences.”

Champs raise £400k



PLAYERS at the World Darts Championship raised over £400,000 for Prostate UK after peppering the treble 20 in the opening nine days of the tournament.

Tournament sponsors Paddy Power pledged to donate £1,000 every time a player hits 180 throughout the flagship event at the Alexandra Palace.

The tally currently stands at £443,000 with 443 maximums, meaning the figure could smash the £1million mark when play resumed yesterday.

Chief Executive of Prostate Cancer UK Laura Kerby said: “It’s been compelling viewing at the Ally Pally.”

Sport

SPORT: CHAIRBOYS IN THE COMMUNITY

Helping children and members of staff

FOOTBALL stars have visited hospitals in Buckinghamshire to spread festive cheer to young patients.

Children at Stoke Mandeville and Wycombe hospitals received surprise gifts from past and present footballers.

Former Wycombe Wanderers players and chair of Academia Technology Group Andrew Harman donated 700 gifts to the children and their families as part of the annual Christmas tradition.

This year he had help

from the current 'Chairboys' Tjay De Barr and Jasper Pattenden to hand out the gifts at the Wycombe Hospital's children's ward on

Monday (December 18).

Andrew said: "It's always a pleasure for us to visit the hospitals and deliver presents for children and families who may miss out on some of the enjoyment that Christmas brings by being in and out of hospital over the festive period.

"It's a small token of our consideration for the

challenges they are going through and each year we want to do something a little bit special to bring a smile to their faces.

"We also feel it's important to thank the staff who do a wonderful job caring for their patients and their families, not just over Christmas but all year round."

As a cherry on top, Wycombe Wanderers donated match tickets to patients and staff for the game against Bristol Rovers at Adams Park on New Year's Day.



Tjay De Barr and Jasper Pattenden visited the hospital

SPORT: NON LEAGUE ACTION IN SOUTH BUCKS

Holmer Green lose once more in struggling season

A week after their heavy defeat at table topping Amersham, the Greens once again faced a tough opponent in promotion chasing Molesey.

With several postponements due to the extremely wet Autumn, the Surrey side were the first visitors to Watchet Lane since late October.

Keith Scott was forced into making several changes to the starting line up with Ruairidh Barnes, Jamie Franks, Oscar Raymond, Mason Scott, Ben Hodges, Luca Clark all on the injury list and James Saxby unavailable.

Ewan Philpot dropped back into defence alongside Sam Hill in what was a very young looking Holmer starting XI which included four of the clubs Allied Counties Under 18's.

As has happened on so many occasions this season an early goal was conceded, when just two minutes into the match the Holmer defence failed to properly clear a cross.

The ball fell to Saad Haidous whose deflected shot from 15 yards gave keeper Matt Messer no chance. The bigger and more experienced visitors had much of possession and territory for the next 20 minutes, but the hard working and organised Greens didn't look like conceding again.

Unfortunately, on 24 minutes the second goal came after a good turn and finish from the edge of the box by Deji Alabi.

This could have been the catalyst for the floodgates to have opened, but great credit must go the young side who started to grow into the game and created a couple of half chance themselves.

On 39 minutes, Messer was out quickly to save following a good run from the Molesey winger. This proved to be an important stop, as just a couple of minutes later Holmer reduced the deficit to one.

Ryan Hennessey received the ball out wide on the left but with two defenders

By Steve Powell

with him his options looked limited.

However, a brilliant piece of skill saw him create some space before drilling in a cross for Ollie White to finish from close range.

The second half started much better than the first for Holmer and there was a strong belief from those watching that there was a very real possibility of getting a result.

Molesey did hit the outside of the post from a tight angle, but Messer appeared to have the shot covered.

On the hour mark, Kudzai Chunga replaced the goal scorer White and it wasn't long before he had the chance to put the Greens level.

A perfectly weighted through ball from Lewis Cousins saw Chunga one on one with the keeper but a good save kept the away team ahead.

On 70 minutes Hennessey had the ball in the back on the net but his header was ruled out for offside.

With 5 minutes remaining, Josh Todd, who had just come on for Aidan Murrell, forced another save from the edge of the box.

This was to be the last chance of salvaging a point although there was still time for Messer to deny Molesey a third.

Whilst it was another defeat there were lots of positives to take from the game and if early errors can be eliminated, 2024 should see the Greens climbing out of the relegation places.

Team: Matt Messer; Max Fanstone, Aaron Bryan, Sam Hill, Aidan Murrell, Ewan Philpot, Ryan Hennessey, Callum Monks, Ollie White, Lewis Cousins, Kizzy Kahari
Substitutes Used: Josh Todd, Kudzai Chunga

Substitutes Not Used: Jack Avery, Alex Baptist



Holmer Green play their games at Watchet Lane in the village

CHAIRBOYS

Cult hero opens up on former boss

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers cult hero Simon Garner has released his second autobiography.

The 64-year-old, who spent two years on the books at Adams Park where he scored 15 league goals in 66 league appearances, spoke about his stint in South Buckinghamshire.

The ex-forward, who is also Blackburn Rovers' all-time top scorer with 194, revealed how he joined the club following his departure from West Bromwich Albion, how he spent some time in prison, and how he fell out with manager Alan Smith, who took over from Martin O'Neill in 1996.

In his latest tell-all book, 'One Last Shot', he recounts: "Why did Alan Smith have to go and f**k it all up?"

"I'm not just saying that because he didn't fancy me much, though he obviously didn't."

"The whole place just lost its momentum from the minute he arrived.

"Under Martin, we finished sixth in Division Two.

"Under Smith, we dropped to 12th.

"He dumped Steve Thompson, Paul Hyde and Terry Howard into non-league football, he changed the first team kit to resemble that of Crystal Palace, the club that had just sacked him after being relegated from the Premiership.

"He made us train at Bisham Abbey where the facilities were good, expensive and, coincidentally I'm sure, where he had his tennis lessons.

"He wore very short shorts.

"On one occasion it was raining as we were walking onto the training pitch and we could see fake tan running down the back of his legs.

"One of the lads laughed and he never played for the club again.

"He presided over the worst attendance in the league history of the club and looked on as the Wycombe board announced record losses of £300,000 for the season.

"Martin's philosophy was to play to our strengths and not to worry about our deficiencies, a dream to a player like me.

"So long as we scored more than the opposition, he didn't care how many we conceded.

"Martin was much keener that we use our heads and take responsibility for situations ourselves.

"It made us an attractive attacking side."

The book, 'One Last Shot', is now out and to purchase it, visit www.simongarner.co.uk.

MORE DROPPED POINTS

Remaining positive despite winless run



The draw against Port Vale at Adams Park means Wycombe haven't beaten the Staffordshire side at home since 2008 (PA)

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Matt Bloomfield believes his side's performances 'need to start matching with results' following a 1-1 draw against Port Vale.

The Chairboys are now winless in 10 league matches following the result at Adams Park, with the Hillbottom Road side securing just three victories at home in the league this season.

And in the draw against the Valiants, Wanderers tallied up 19 shots on goal but only six on target.

This was in comparison to Vale's eight, with two testing Max Stryjek in the Wycombe goal.

Bloomfield said: "We had numerous opportunities to go two and three nil up which we didn't take.

"The game should have been beyond

Port Vale at that point.

"We had a corner which broke down on the edge of the box where we don't defend the set-piece situation.

"They had bodies in the box and for us, we need to see out these moments.

"Everyone is probably getting sick of me talking about stats and performances but it's all about results.

"We've been so close in recent games so we'll be retaining that belief.

"It cannot go on forever where we're leading in games, being in winning positions and come out of games where we're not winning.

"Our performances need to start matching the results."

CHAIRBOYS

Life as a manager at Christmas

WYCOMBE Wanderers boss Matt Bloomfield has revealed how the festive fixtures have impacted his daily life at home.

The Chairboys will play four matches across a nine-day spell which includes fixtures at Exeter City and Leyton Orient respectively, along clashes at home to Port Vale and Bristol Rovers.

He told the Free Press: "If I'm allowed to give my honest view without trying to sound like I'm playing a violin, it's tough.

"I've missed my girls in their nativity plays, I've missed Christmas Day, I left my family home at midday and made my way into training before we went to Exeter.

"With two young girls, it's the most special time of the year in their lives, and I'm absent.

"It is tough because we played on the 23rd, I spent Christmas Eve watching back the Port Vale game and then Exeter, and on Christmas Day I was there for a few hours to see them open their presents.

"Before Christmas dinner, I headed off in the car to go training at Adams Park.

"It's not nice to be away from my two little ones, who I love incredibly, but it's part of life and it's the life I signed up for."

XMAS HELP

All for a good cause during the festive season

A YOUNG Wycombe Wanderers fan was allowed to star in a local radio show with a current Chairboys hero.

Harry Goodacre, who is from Amersham, contacted the club as he was keen to learn about the club's radio output and was shown behind the scenes how to commentate on a match day at Adams Park.

Wanderers responded and let the supporter interview the current top scorer, Luke Leahy.

The chat was broadcasted on Radio Christmas (www.radiochristmas.co.uk), on December 22.

The show also featured some of the Wycombe player's favourite festive songs.

Radio Christmas is a charity radio station broadcasting a variety of music and shows throughout December, leading up to Christmas Day.

The station is run entirely by volunteers from the local community around Amersham, raising money for the charity Street Kids Direct.

MATCH: WYCOMBE WANDERERS 1-1 PORT VALE

So close yet so far as points are dropped at Adams Park

WYCOMBE Wanderers' winless league run has stretched to 10 games after Port Vale scored a 90th-minute equaliser to secure a 1-1 draw at Adams Park.

A Kieran Sadlier strike just after half-time, which was his first league goal for the club, looked to have given the Chairboys their first victory since October, but James Wilson's finish in the dying moments means the wait goes on for three points.

The home side nearly took the lead on four minutes when Luke Leahy's dipping half-volley looped over Connor Ripley also the crossbar.

Wanderers' supremacy continued throughout the opening stages as Sam Vokes headed wide from a Garath McCleary cross, Joe Low's header forced Ripley into a save, before Sadlier also made the keeper work with a low drive from range.

Josh Scowen and Killian Phillips also tried their luck,

and despite Vale looking nervy at the back, they couldn't break down their stubborn defence.

The chances continued as Leahy and Sadlier went close again, but the two sides went in goalless at the break.

Wycombe's control as the second period began as they eventually got their goal just after the break.

On 51 minutes, a McCleary cross was fired home by Sadlier on the half-volley from close-range.

It was the 29-year-old's first in the league for the Chairboys since joining in September, with it being his second of the campaign.

Wycombe continued to push forward as substitutes Dale and Lyle Taylor went close, but there was drama in the final moments as Port Vale scored late on through a Ben Garrity header.

The result means Wycombe have not won a league game at home to Port Vale since November 2008 – a run that stretches more than 5,000 days.



The draw means Wycombe haven't won a league match at Adams Park since September (PA)

THE 11 AGAINST PORT VALE

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Stryjek | 22. Phillips |
| 2. Grimmer | 23. Sadlier |
| 5. Forino | 9. Vokes |
| 17. Low | SUBS USED: |
| 11. Boyes | Wheeler, D |
| 4. Scowen | Taylor and L |
| 10. Leahy | Taylor |
| 12. McCleary | |

No league win at home since September

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Matt Bloomfield is remaining confident despite the club's recent 1-1 draw against Port Vale.

A Kieran Sadlier strike just after half-time was cancelled out by an injury-time header from Ben Garrity, who extended the Chairboys' winless run in the league.

The Adams Park side have not won a match in the division since the 4-1 hammering away at Fleetwood Town on October 7.

The boss said: "We could have had those moments to win the game in the final moments but we didn't take them.

"We didn't feel they threatened us at any point.

"We had a corner that broke down, Lukey tried to give away a tactical foul but then it's a long ball in and they score from it.

"We had enough bodies in there but we needed to see that out.

"They had one scruffy moment in

our six-yard box which they took, and for all of our good play, shots on target and possession comes down to that one moment.

"It's tough to know things aren't going in your favour when the evidence shows that it should be.

"But you can't argue with reality as we haven't won enough games recently but the spirit, camaraderie and the performances, have been there.

"It's unfortunate that these things

aren't going in our favour at the moment."

The draw means Wanderers have not won a league match at Adams Park since September, when they defeated Carlisle United 2-0.

To read more about the latest Wycombe Wanderers news, go to www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/sport or follow James Richings on X (formerly known as Twitter), more additional stats, facts and other nuggets of information.

SPORT

0963-2336



Leahy misses last-minute penalty in Exeter defeat



Exeter are unbeaten in their last eight games against Wycombe

WYCOMBE Wanderers made it 11 league games without a win following a 1-0 defeat away at struggling Exeter City.

A Sonny Cox strike midway through the second period added more pressure onto manager Matt Bloomfield, as the result secured the Grecians' first league double over the Chairboys, whilst the victory for the home side was their first since the middle of September.

And after Exeter defeated Wycombe on the opening day of the season 3-0 at Adams Park, which included a goal

after just 20 seconds, the South West side nearly repeated the same feat, as Tom Carroll forced Max Stryjek into a save moments into the contest.

Wanderers tried their best to get into the contest as Kieran Sadlier and Jack Grimmer caused several problems along the right-hand side, but to no avail.

The opening period lacked any real cutting edge, but Wanderers nearly went into the break a goal up as Kane Vincent-Young fired wide, whilst Luke Leahy missed the target on the volley. The second half saw the tempo

increase for both sides as Exeter and Wycombe looked for that elusive first goal.

For Wanderers, Garath McCleary, Dale Taylor and Lyle Taylor, who all came off the bench, tried their luck but to no avail, whilst Will Aitchison and Reece Cole forced Stryjek into some brilliant saves.

Then, Wycombe were hit with a sucker punch as Cox's close-range finish on 65 minutes turned out to be the winner.

The Chairboys tried to find an equaliser in the final moments as both Taylors, McCleary, Boyes and Scowen

went close before drama unfolded in the final few seconds as Wanderers were given an injury-time penalty.

This was due to Dale Taylor being brought down by Harry Kite, but Viljami Sinisalo, who is on loan from Aston Villa, in the Exeter goal brilliantly denied Leahy from the spot.

It's the first Wanderers penalty he has missed since moving from Shrewsbury Town in the summer.

The result means Wycombe are 17th, five points above the relegation zone.

Up next is Leyton Orient on December 29.

Another defeat for the Chairboys in the league

By James Richings

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Matt Bloomfield has reflected on his side's 1-0 defeat away at Exeter City.

A Sonny Cox goal midway through the second half confirmed the Chairboys' 11th consecutive league game without a win, whilst the Grecians recorded their first victory in three months.

There was also drama in the final few seconds as Wanderers were awarded a penalty, but Luke Leahy's spot-kick was saved by Viljami Sinisalo.

The result means the Adams Park side are now just five points above the drop zone, with their run of 11 games without a league win being their joint-worst record since the 2020/21 season.

Speaking after the loss at St James Park, Bloomfield said: "I thought we were off it, to be honest.

"First half, I thought we were half a second away and we weren't quite condensed in our shape.

"I thought we were a tad too open and ultimately, these little moments gathered momentum for Exeter.

"We corrected a few things at half-time and during the second half, I thought we looked a bit more of a threat.

"Their goal came at a time when I thought we were in the ascendancy as Killian had a chance, but today was very disappointing.

"Kieran Sadlier had a goal disallowed, Dale Taylor hit the bar and the penalty at the end.

"We haven't been steamrolled over since the first two games of the season and we have improved, but we need to try and

change this.

"We had that moment against Derby and we felt that was the springboard that we wanted to use, and the performance on Saturday [against Port Vale] was very good."

He continued: "It's extremely disappointing for the players and fans to go through a time like this, but we have to show that character to get out of it and I know we can.

"We have been in every game during this run and not enough have gone in our favour.

"It's very disappointing and we need to try and change the tide."

Exeter manager, Gary Caldwell, whose side hadn't won in the league since the start of September, said: "Too often we play good football to a point and then nothing comes of it but our energy, enthusiasm and desire to keep going was incredible.

"The goal summed it up - it is something that we work on and the most amazing goal I have ever seen!

"Sonny is a player with a big future.

"He went away on loan and showed his quality at a level way below where we are playing, but the way he has come back and shown improvement in his physicality and confidence shows the loan did him the world of good.

"I thought he was outstanding and it was his best performance he has had for this football club and like I have said many times, he has huge potential."



The result means Wycombe have lost seven of their last 13 matches in the league. A run that dates back to the start of October (PA)

Getting ready for the final fixture of 2023

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Matt Bloomfield has revealed he may 'freshen things up' for when his side take on Leyton Orient on Friday night.

The Chairboys are winless in their last 11 league matches and are bottom of the form table, with four points gained from their last 30 available.

And the 1-0 defeat against Exeter City on Boxing Day would have added more pressure onto Bloomfield, as the Grecians secured their first victory in the league for well over three months.

Speaking ahead of their trip to Brisbane Road on December 29, Bloomfield said: "They are a good team.

"We had a really good game against them earlier on in the season so we need to be prepared and be ready to go.

"We might make a couple of changes to freshen things up as we've had two very physical and tough games in quick succession.

"We've got the drive home, we'll watch the game back, watch them and be ready to face Orient on Friday.

"At this stage of the season, I think it's good that we've got another game straight away which will give us an opportunity to bounce back."

Wycombe won the return fixture 3-2 back in August at Adams Park which was the club's first league win of the campaign.

They have won just five times in the division since, and their visit to South London this week will be their first trip to Os since the 2016/17 season.

The Chairboys won 2-0 that day in April 2017, with Matt Bloomfield getting himself on the Wanderers scoresheet.

Myles Weston also got a goal that day, seconds after Wycombe went 1-0 up.