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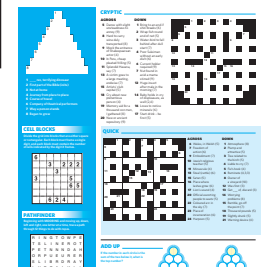
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SPORT

Argyle
analysis at
Adams Park

It wasn't Wanderers day (PA)

DESPITE falling to a 1-0 loss against Plymouth Argyle, Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth has insisted that his side's performance was 'good enough for the win'.

A Sam Cosgrove penalty inside the opening 10 minutes was all that separated the two sides at Adams Park, in a match that saw the Chairboys have 18 attempts, but only six were on target.

Those six saves from Michael Cooper all came in the opening half, as the 22-year-old played brilliantly to deny Wanderers anything from the match.

This result means Wycombe have now lost three league games in a row for the second time this season, as they sit in 19th place.

Ainsworth said: "The performance was good enough for a win.

"Their keeper made some brilliant saves and I can be harsh and say we need to stick them in, but, when he is in form like that, it was tough to beat him today.

"And we should have but we didn't. "We put a lot of pressure on them in the first-half but it was a clumsy tackle for the penalty and that was the difference.

"It's frustrating but we played like that against a team that is top of the table in League One, and I said to the boys that if they play like that, they will be fine."

During the match, the 49-year-old gave Adams Leathers his Football League debut as a second-half substitute for Daryl Horgan for the final 20 minutes.

It was only his fifth match for the club since signing from Leicester City last season, and although he had one or two passes that went astray, the 22-year-old made his presence known with several challenges and middle-of-the-park battles.

Ainsworth added: "I thought he [Leathers] did really well.

"We've got players like Tyla Dickinson, Jasper Patten, and Ali Al-Hamadi who have all made their debuts and it's brilliant to see.

"That's what we're doing here.

"This year, we're relying on youth due to the injuries and they are good enough as we've seen with Anis Mehmeti and Chris Forino."

Finally, despite losing the first game of the month, Ainsworth is feeling positive for the rest of the season.

He concluded: "I'm confident for the rest of the season, never mind October.

Al-Hamadi hopes for more opportunities

By James Richings

WYCOMBE forward Ali Al-Hamadi believes his two goals in the recent practice match against Norwich City's U21s will help him push forward in the first-team.

The former Tranmere Rovers and Swansea City youngster also played the entire match against the Canaries in what was the Chairboys' 11th friendly this season.

Manager Gareth Ainsworth hopes to have more matches like this as the campaign continues to help helps players gain match time, fitness and confidence.

"As a centre forward, you get judged on how many goals you get so my performances have to be good, as they will eventually lead to goals.

"Coming off the bench was my target but now it's time to start chipping in with a few goals in the league, and as long as I keep training and working hard, it'll eventually will come."

Despite having some great chances to get his first league strike for the season, the 20-year-old revealed that he is learning 'game by game' and that the experienced players within the team are helping him improve.

He also revealed that working with strikers such as Sam Vokes and Brandon Hanlan are helping him improve his style.

Al-Hamadi continued: "I'm learning game by game.

"There have been a few games where I have come off the bench and have made a great impact, whilst others have been a bit of a whirlwind like at Sheffield Wednesday.

"As a 20-year-old coming on a sub in League One, it's not easy, especially when you're coming on for Sam Vokes or Anis Me-



Ali Al-Hamadi celebrates scoring his first competitive Adams Park goal against Bristol City in August (PA)

hmeti who have been brilliant.

"But I back myself to do that and hopefully I'll get more experience and that league goal will come.

On working with Vokes, Al-Hamadi added: "He has brought a new dimension to my game.

"My strengths are running behind people and his are to hold it

up, flick it on and I love learning from him.

"However, you must also bring your own personality to the game so I don't want to be too much like Sam Vokes as Sam Vokes is Sam Vokes.

"But, I can take parts of his game and use it in mine, just like what I did with Bayo [Adebayo

Akinfenwa] last season and even Brandon Hanlan."

Away from scoring in the League Cup against Bristol City, Al-Hamadi has bagged strikes in numerous friendlies against AFC Bournemouth (twice), Worthing, Norwich City U21s, Brentford and Kinetic Foundation Academy.



Adebayo Akinfenwa gave Ali Al-Hamadi some advice last season (PA)

A new type of beast in Buckinghamshire

WYCOMBE forward Ali Al-Hamadi has revealed the biggest piece of advice club legend Adebayo Akinfenwa gave him before the latter retired at the back end of last season.

The now 40-year-old hung up his boots at the conclusion of the 2021/22 campaign, in which he scored 61 goals in 250 appearances across six years at Adams Park.

One of his last contributions as a Chairboy was to advise the development players on how they can improve their game, with Al-Hamadi

being one of the young talents to take tips of the former forward.

He said: "I have progress loads but sometimes it's hard to measure that, but I think you see it how you feel.

"Game by game and as time goes on, I feel like I am growing as a person and as a better player.

"The physicality of the game is something that I have learnt a lot about.

"You just don't learn these things. "When I was at Swansea, even that, which was Premier League academy

football, those were things that you just didn't learn such as, how to use your body, how to by fouls or win duels against people.

"Last season, Adebayo Akinfenwa sat me down and told me that I need to make my mark, regardless of how old you are.

"So, there are lots of things that you don't learn from academy football that you learn in the Football League.

"It's also brought your personality to the game and for me, it's a case of making people aware of what that is.

Manager on injury woes

GARETH Ainsworth has spoken about the number of injuries his squad have had following the Chairboys' 1-0 home defeat against Plymouth Argyle.

The result, which was the club's third consecutive loss in the league, puts the Adams Park side in 19th place in the table, just two points off the relegation places.

They have only won three of their 11 matches in the division, with their League One clean sheets this campaign all coming in their three victories.

And the manager believes that the injuries have impacted his squad, but admits that he 'won't cry about it', as he wants to concentrate on the 'positives'.

Ainsworth said: "I've never had

anything like this before.

"Brandon Hanlan, David Wheeler, Curtis Thompson, D'Mani Mellor, Dominic Gape, Ryan Tafazolli and it looks like we've lost Chris Forino now too.

"It's just getting tougher and tougher but when we reach the second half of the season, or even before that, we will have players back.

"We've got one or two coming back which is crucial and even though it's going against us, we've had the rub of the green for a long time and we've had a lot of success.

"The last seven years have been phenomenal, but this is a little stutter.

"The performance was really good as they ran for me."

Alan Parry Previews Oxford United away



The Kassam Stadium (PA)

FOOTBALL is a game of opinions, but there is a saying which perfectly describes today's keyboard critics: 'What a pity all the people who know how best to manage football teams are busy doing other jobs or sitting on their sofas!'

I thought about it this week when social media went into predictable meltdown after Wycombe suffered a third successive defeat in their 1-0 loss to League One leaders Plymouth Argyle.

A crippling injury list and a set of fixtures that would have challenged the best teams in the division were glossed over in the need to find a scapegoat.

There were calls for manager Gareth Ainsworth to be sacked and predictions that his team are facing a relegation battle.

This just four months after Ainsworth led the Chairboys to a club record number of points in the EFL and stood 90 minutes away from promotion to the Championship for the second time in three seasons.

Ainsworth was lambasted for his inactivity in the transfer market, training methods, team selection, style of play, use of substitutes etc.

He was labelled 'clueless,' 'tactically inept,' 'lacking a plan B' and the other thoughtless clichés trotted out by people with no comparable background in the game.

The armchair critics clearly believe they know more than a man who played 600 games in professional football and has been a successful manager for ten years.

It is against this inflated background that Wanderers face Oxford United at the Kassam Stadium on Saturday, October 8.

Oxford have also made a disappointing start to the season with only three wins from eleven games and they are 18th in the table, one place above Wycombe on the same number of points.

Wanderers have not won away to their near neighbours since November 1, 2014, but fans will take encouragement from the four points gained against Karl Robinson's team last season, and their memorable victory over them in the play-off final at Wembley two years ago.

A win would relieve some of the pressure, another defeat, and the keyboard 'experts' will be in full angry mode once again.



Gareth Ainsworth (pictured in 2020) revealed his ever-growing injury list after the club's 1-0 home loss against Plymouth Argyle (PA)

Positive Plymouth run comes to an end



Daryl Horgan came off midway through the second-half as Wycombe Wanderers lost 1-0 at home against Plymouth Argyle (PA)

WYCOMBE Wanderers' seven-match unbeaten run against Plymouth Argyle has come to an end following a 1-0 home loss at Adams Park.

The Chairboys had not lost against the Devon-based side since 2015, which had seen them win five and draw two of the next seven fixtures.

Prior to kick-off, both sets of fans, players and everyone else inside Adams Park paid their respects to the late Bill Turnbull who passed away from prostate cancer in August with a minute's applause.

On the match, Wycombe found themselves 1-0 down inside the first seven minutes through a Sam Cosgrove penalty.

The striker, who was making his first start of the season since his loan move from Birmingham City in the summer, was fouled in the box and he duly stepped to score his third goal of the campaign.

Morgan Whittaker nearly doubled Argyle's lead through a rasping first-time shot that went over moments later, before Wanderers got a foothold of the game.

On 19 minutes, Wycombe nearly equalised through a flying header from Chris Forino, but Michael Cooper, who jointly won the Golden Glove with ex-Wanderers keeper David Stockdale last season, produced a stunning one-handed stop to deny the centre back.

This opened up the Plymouth defence, but Cooper was there to make save after save.

The 22-year-old then brilliantly thwarted both Anis Mehmeti and Sam Vokes with a double save midway through the first-half, before he again stopped the Welsh striker, and then

James Richings

from a Lewis Wing free-kick.

Vokes also headed after Nick Freeman did fantastically to get around three defenders and provide the cross.

The visitors led at the break but it was very slender.

The second period was a frustrating affair as Wanderers couldn't break down a stubborn and resilient Argyle backline.

They pushed forward and despite the introductions of Ali Al-Hamadi, Sulay Kaikai, Jack Grimmer, and Adam Leathers, the latter who was making his league debut, Wycombe couldn't find an answer.

Their best chance fell to Vokes who fired a volley wide of the target on 55 minutes.

We are going down. Something isn't right. Something needs to change. No idea what, I'm baffled, this isn't the Wycombe I know and love. Injuries is an excuse. Other than Hanlan and Seowen who has only been out 2 weeks who is due back that will make a difference? I'm very worried

Instead, misplaced passes, heavy touches, and hesitant decision-making was common for the Chairboys.

The away side could have wrapped up the win inside the last 10 minutes, but Danny Mayor fired over from range.

The defeat means Wycombe have now lost three league games in a row for the second time this season as they fall to just outside the relegation zone.

Up next is an away trip against M40 rivals Oxford United on October 8.

Attendance: 5,869 (1,200 away)

SPORT

Building up to the feisty M40 derby



Wycombe Wanderers' 2-1 win over Oxford United in July 2020 secured the club their place in the Championship for the first time (PA)

By James Richings

CHAIRBOYS boss Gareth Ainsworth believes the Oxford United/Wycombe Wanderers derby has been 'established' over the last few seasons due to the recent successes of both teams.

Both Thames Valley sides have either reached a competitive final or achieved promotion out of Leagues Two and One since 2015, with the two teams battling it out for a place in the Championship since 2020.

Wanderers defeated the Us in the aforementioned year's League One play-off final to secure their spot in the second tier of English football for the first time, whilst Wycombe lost this year's final

against Sunderland.

Wanderers also achieved an automatic promotion into League One in 2018, whilst losing the 2015 League Two play-off final.

Oxford has also enjoyed similar successes in that time frame.

The club, under the stewardship of former boss Michael Appleton, reached the 2016 and 2017 Football League Trophy finals at Wembley Stadium but were defeated by Barnsley and Coventry City respectively.

In the league however, they achieved promotion to League One in May 2016 after a 15-year absence.

Coincidentally, a 3-0 victory on the final day of that season against Gareth Ainsworth's Wanderers at the Kassam Stadium

was the crowning moment that secured Oxford's place in the third tier.

Since then, they have been a League One regular finishing in the top half of the table in five of the last six seasons which has included two play-off campaigns.

They have also finished in eighth place on two occasions.

Speaking ahead of Saturday's match, Ainsworth said: "The derby has established itself over the last few years and I'm really proud of that.

"I think Karl [Robinson] should be proud of what he's done as well because when both clubs went through their tough times, Wycombe were considered a small club, not a rival to anyone, and just a walkover or a pushover.

"And Oxford dropped into the Non League [in 2006] and they were considered not the giants that they were once were.

"Now though, credit has to go to both clubs and it's a great derby, of course it is.

"Both similar size clubs, I think Oxford average around 7,000 and we get around 5,000, their history is bigger than ours as they go a long way so it's a real good derby.

"And I know that the Oxford fans won't really consider this to be a derby, but, I think over the years we have deserved to be worthy opponents for Oxford and I think we can be worthy opponents on Saturday."

Wycombe are expected to sell out their allocation at the Kassam Stadium.



Bloomfield and Ainsworth (PA)

Good luck Mr Wycombe

WYCOMBE Wanderers boss Gareth Ainsworth believes club legend and former captain Matt Bloomfield 'will be a success' at Colchester United, following the latter's recent appointment as manager.

The 38-year-old left the Chairboys ending a 19-year association with the club to take up the reins at the Colchester Community Stadium on September 30.

He took charge of his first game in management a day later at AFC Wimbledon, and despite the Us taking the lead through Kwesi Appiah's first goal for the club, a double from Josh Davison succumbed United to their seventh league loss in 11 games.

Ainsworth said: "I know he started off with a defeat at Wimbledon, but I think he will be a success there.

"He will turn them around and he'll get some of the Wycombe culture there, but he'll have his own ideas with what he wants to do."

Magic Mehmeti up for an award

WYCOMBE Wanderers youngster Anis Mehmeti has been nominated for the League One Player of the Month award for September.

The 21-year-old, who penned a new deal with the Chairboys at the back end of 2021, played five times in the division where he scored two goals and registered one assist.

Since the beginning of the campaign, the Albanian Under 21 international has played 13 games in all competitions in which he has scored five goals.

This has made him the club's informant this season.

Mehmeti is alongside Jack Diamond at Lincoln City, Marlon Pack at Portsmouth, and Morgan Whittaker at Plymouth Argyle who have all been nominated for the prize.

To read more up-to-date Wycombe Wanderers and local sports news in the Bucks Free Press, visit the BFP website by going to www.bucksfreepress.co.uk or follow James Richings on Twitter (@James_BFP).