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## SPORT

Sold out in the sunny south coast



#### A full house in Pompey (PA)

PORTSMOUTH have confirmed that their match against Wycombe Wanderers on March 19 at Fratton Park has sold out.

The stadium, which holds 21,100 seats, is expected to hold one of Pompey's highest attended games this season.

Their biggest crowd so far this campaign was against Sunderland in September, was 17,418 people watched the Seasideers smash the Black Cats 4-0.

Going into Saturday's game, Portsmouth have not lost at home in the league since January and their defeat to Plymouth Argyle on March 15 was their first loss in nine games.

Wycombe and Pompey have met 15 times in all competitions with Wanderers winning four of those fixtures, Portsmouth six, with there being five draws.

Since their first meeting in the 2012/13 season, Wycombe have only won at Fratton Park on two occasions, with both those matches coming in cup ties.

## Happy with powerful performance

GARETH Ainsworth was pleased with the way his side conducted themselves in the 0-0 draw against league leaders, Rotherham United.

Despite not getting that important goal, Wanderers won a number of midfield battles and put the table toppers on the backfoot, with Josh Scowen and Lewis Wing working wonders in the centre of midfield, driving the Wycombe attacks.

It was also another clean sheet for Wycombe which is their third in two games this month.

The boss said: "I'm proud to say that we are competing.

"We can only do what we can do and that's getting results at Adams Park and on the road.

"The 11 that are out there are the ones that look after the games and they look after the points."

# Ainsworth praises Millers' Paul Warne

By James Richings

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth has heaped praise onto his opposite number, Paul Warne, following Wanderers' 0-0 draw against Rotherham United.

The Millers are top of the League One table and look to be heading back into the Championship after one season out, as the draw at Adams Park has taken up to 77 points.

They are four points ahead of ahead second placed Wigan Athletic and have only eight league games left of the season.

The Yorkshire side also have a date with Sutton United in the EFL Trophy final at Wembley Stadium in the spring.

Ainsworth said: "You have to credit Rotherham.

"They are top of the league, Paul Warne is a very good manager, and he is very organised.

"He was crediting me for being organised and I am proud of that but he is very, very organised.

"When you have got someone like Wood, who is like a Sergeant Major, organising his defence, it pays dividends.

"They filled up the box when we tried to get in there but there is no shame in drawing against the league leaders."

Despite their brilliant season so far, the away side were on the backfoot against Wycombe as the Chairboys had numerous chances to score during the contest.

Sam Vokes, Daryl Horgan, Lewis Wing (who was playing against his former side), Anis Mehmeti, Adebayo Akinfenwa and Brandon Hanlan all had attempts on goal that were either saved by Josh Vickers in the Millers goal, or, they went just wide of the target.

But from a defensive aspect, you could see why Rotherham have only lost eight times this season in all competitions and why they have



Rotherham boss Paul Warne at Adams Park following the Millers' 0-0 draw against Wycombe on March 12. Both fixtures between the two sides this season have finished goalless. (PA)

only let in five away league goals since August, which is the best record for any EFL side this campaign.

Only Chelsea (nine) and Manchester City (eight), have conceded less than 10 away league goals this season.

The back line of Wes Harding, Shane Ferguson, Angus MacDonald,

Richard Wood and Michael Ihiekwe were faultless in denied potential Wanderers attacks, and this is down the work of Warne, who has been relegated three times and promoted twice as Rotherham's manager.

He took over the job in November 2016.

Ainsworth continued: "He is a great guy.

"It is fantastic what he has done for Rotherham United.

"I really hope he gets the credit he deserves, but I am really proud of everyone here who has accelerated us [Wycombe] to where we are today."

Both matches between Wycombe and Rotherham this season have ended 0-0.



Wycombe boss Gareth Ainsworth is still hopeful for promotion (PA)

## A clean sheet against the league favourites

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth believes that his side are 'good enough to be in and around the top six' of the League One table.

Wanderers drew 0-0 with Rotherham United on March 12 and despite picking up a point against the league leaders, who have only lost twice this calendar year, the Chairboys bossed the match but couldn't find that important goal that would have given them all three points.

This now means Wycombe are three points and two places off the play-off

spots.

Two months ago, following the 2-0 win over Oxford United, Wanderers went top of the table, but suffered a run of no wins in seven matches.

Speaking after the draw against the Millers, Ainsworth said: "Daryl Horgan, Garath McCleary, Anis Mehmeti, Brandon Hanlan, Sam Vokes and Adebayo Akinfenwa were sensational with some of their play.

"We really can tear it up, but it is that final bit of sticking it in the goal.

"There was some fantastic play with

some brilliant crosses, some good efforts on goal but it was all in vain as it was a 0-0, but I am proud of the performance.

"We are good enough to be in and around the top six. The efforts were fantastic and the way that we are playing now is a transition to a new style and the boys are really confident on the ball at the moment and I'm loving seeing that.

"We had a great week's training and I thought we deserved three during the game."



# Omission for Obita

GARETH Ainsworth has revealed that left-wing back Jordan Obita missed Wycombe's 0-0 draw against Rotherham United due to illness.

The Chairboys made one change from the 3-1 win over Crewe Alexandra the week earlier, as the former Reading man missed out altogether, which saw Joe Jacobson return to the starting line-up. It was the first time this season that Wanderers' left sided defender had missed a league match since the 2-1 away victory over Shrewsbury Town in September.

It was also the first time he had been out of the squad for

a league game this season.

Speaking on his absence, and the performance of Jacobson, Ainsworth said: "Being professional on a Friday night has paid off.

"He [Jacobson] knew that he wasn't in the squad but he has prepared as if something may happen, something did happen and drafting Joe in was crucial.

"I thought he did really well along with Jason McCarthy on the other side.

"Overall, I am pleased with the performance and if we keep playing like we did today, we will make the play-offs.

"Otherwise, it's how we were."



Jordan Obita (pictured against Man City in September) missed the draw against Rotherham on March 12 (PA)

# Boss on the display and Thompson update



Gareth Ainsworth (PA)

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth has shared his thoughts on the Chairboys' 1-0 win over Fleetwood.

He said: "We don't do things undramatically as we always raise the heart rates of everyone and I'm just glad we got that goal because it was deserved but it was really harsh on Fleetwood on the way it went in.

"If Garath's, Brandon's or Daryl's chance had gone in, then maybe they would have been able to swallow that better. "It did look harsh but we will take that."

Finally, Ainsworth provided an injury-time update on midfielder, Curtis Thompson.

The 28-year-old has missed the six matches, and it's expected that he'll miss the remainder of the season. The boss said:

"Curtis Thompson is still on crutches from his tackle in the Cheltenham match.

"It's a nasty one. "If we can extend the season for as long as possible, I'm sure Curtis might feature."

# McCarthy on his late goal in last-gasp win

WYCOMBE defender Jason McCarthy believes that his last-minute winner against Fleetwood could help with 'momentum' as they enter the final stages of the league season.

The right-back smashed home his first goal of the season in the 90th minute to seal all three points for the Chairboys, who are now unbeaten in four games.

This is off the back of a seven game winless run which saw the go from top to seventh.

Speaking after the dramatic finish at Adams Park, McCarthy said: "We deserved it and I thought we were the better team.

"I think they've got some really good and talented young players and I think they'll stay up as they're fighters who have got a fighting spirit."

# Positive after hard-fought draw at home



Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth was positive following the 0-0 draw against league leaders, Rotherham United (PA)

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth believes it will be 'negative' to look at the Chairboys' 0-0 home draw against Rotherham United as a case of two points dropped.

Wanderers dominated the contest against the league leaders, most notably in the second half, but couldn't find that decisive goal that would have secured their third straight league win.

The Millers defended brilliant with Richard Wood and Michael Ihiekwe throwing their bodies on the line to thwart any Chair-boy attacks, as the fixture at Adams Park finished goalless.

This means that Rotherham remain top of the League One table on 77 points, whilst Wycombe drop down to eighth on 62 points.

They are now three points of the play-off places.

Speaking after the stalemate, Ainsworth said: "I thought it's two points dropped looking at the game and I'll be frustrated that we didn't score, but I really never look at it like that as that's a negative thing.

"We've added another point onto our total and that point could get us into the play-offs at the end of the season and that's how I am looking at it.

"The boys know what is at stake and I have always said to judge us after 46 games and hopefully we will be in the top six."

The 48-year-old also dismissed the notion that he and his players will be looking at other

By James Richings

results as we enter the final stretch of the season.

On the same day as Wanderers' 0-0 draw against Paul Warne's side, who have only conceded five away league goals since August, Sheffield Wednesday smashed Cambridge United 6-0 to move above the Chairboys, whilst Oxford United, Sunderland, Milton Keynes and Plymouth Argyle all picked up wins.

He continued: "It's in our hands.

"There is no way we are looking at other results to go in our favour.

"We have 27 points to play for, and if we get all 27, we could make second place and that's how I will be billing it to the boys.

"Performances is what I am about and that was good enough for me."

The 0-0 draw against Rotherham means a clean sheet has been kept in the last five fixtures between the two sides.

**Remaining league fixtures:**

- Portsmouth: March 19 (A)
- Doncaster Rovers: April 2 (H)
- Cambridge United: April 5 (A)
- Gillingham: April 9 (A)
- Plymouth Argyle: April 15 (H)
- AFC Wimbledon: April 18 (A)
- Shef Wednesday: April 23 (H)
- Burton Albion: April 30 (A)

Wanderers also have a fixture against Ascot in the Berks and Bucks Cup.

## SPORT

0963-2336



# McCarthy sinks the spirited Cod Army



Gareth Ainsworth (PA)

## Analysis on Fleetwood victory

GARETH Ainsworth believes the substitutes made a difference in Wycombe's 1-0 win over Fleetwood on March 15.

Brandon Hanlan, Jack Young and Brandon Hanlan all came on during the second half and their attacking play in the final few moments of the contest eventually led to Jason McCarthy's last-gasp winner.

However, despite the three points, the boss hopes that the Chairboys can kill of teams 'earlier' as they continue to push for Championship promotion.

Wanderers have eight games remaining with five of those fixtures being against teams who are either fighting to avoid relegation, or, are in mid-table and are in position where going down or going up will take place.

Those matches are against Doncaster (April 2), Cambridge (April 5), Gillingham (April 9), AFC Wimbledon (April 18) and Burton (April 30).

Their three other games are against Portsmouth (March 19), Plymouth (April 15) and Sheffield Wednesday (April 23), who are pushing for promotion.

Ainsworth said: "We would like to put the game to bed earlier if we can.

"The boys have been fantastic, and I got them in this afternoon working on set pieces to try and get a bit of momentum into us and they have come up trumps and I'm really proud.

"Jack Young was a shining light, Bayo made his mark as he always does and Brandon [Hanlan] also made a difference as we did look like we were getting a bit tired.

"I've been able to pick the regular team that I've picked lately and picking the same 11 can take it out of your legs, so, maybe some of the fringe players might get a look in for Portsmouth on Saturday."

The boss has also praised the defensive display as the Chairboys kept their third clean sheet in four games, taking their league shut outs for the season to 14.

Ainsworth added: "We've address a few things as we went through a real bad patch of four games, where we conceded five, then three and then a 0-0, but it seems like that little wobble is now a distance memory which is great.

"The boys have really turned up as we defend as a unit and they've been brilliant."



Jason McCarthy's first goal of the season was his first at Adams Park since January 2020 when he scored in a 2-1 victory over Rochdale (PA)

By Taylor Toney-Green

JASON McCarthy scored a 90th-minute winner as Wycombe left it late to secure an important victory over relegation-threatened Fleetwood Town.

It looked like Wanderers were going to record their second straight scoreless draw at home, but the right-back's first goal of the season has given the Chairboys a real boost for their promotion chances.

Gareth Ainsworth opted for zero changes from the side that drew 0-0 with league leaders Rotherham, whilst the visitors were desperate to snap their four game losing streak and made three changes.

Fleetwood's paper-thin squad had stayed overnight in High Wycombe to avoid the arduous four hour coach

journey and it paid off as they started the livelier of the two.

Dan Butterworth took advantage of a defensive mix-up to race in behind.

Stockdale produced a smart stop to deny the youngster and he would do the same again stretching out to tip Paddy Lane's curling effort away.

The hosts began to work their way into the game.

Lewis Wing's audacious effort from the edge of the box beat goalkeeper Kieran O'Hara but dropped onto the roof of the net.

This time, the Irish 'keeper was forced into action as his fellow-countryman in Daryl Horgan peeled away from the Fleetwood midfield and fed in Garath McCleary.

No sooner could he weigh up the shot, O'Hara charged out and saved well from the winger, but chances kept com-

ing the Chairboys' way as Anis Mehmeti chipped to Horgan in a dangerous area but off-balance he skewed it wide.

Wycombe were getting the ball in the right areas but were struggling to add venom to their attacks.

From a cleared Joe Jacobson free-kick, McCleary picked out Wing who stabbed back across goal to find Ryan Tafazolli but he failed to keep his header down.

Ainsworth was hoping the Albanian would bring the necessary poison to wound the visitors.

His silky touch allowed him to ghost beyond the defence and drill a cross whiskers beyond Sam Vokes and the far post.

The second period was one full of frustration for the Chairboys.

Although they controlled a lot of the ball, they failed to penetrate a resilient Fleetwood backline that had gone the previous 15 games without a clean sheet.

In desperate search for a goal, Wycombe had a gung-ho front three of Vokes, Brandon Hanlan and Adebayo Akinfenwa.

The trio in question should have combined for the late opener.

Vokes flicked onto Akinfenwa then straight into Hanlan's path.

Knocking it round the keeper with the goal and the terrace gaping he would agonisingly find the latter.

Wycombe would rely on its fabled play-book to give them a last-gasp winner.

Deep into stoppage time, Jack Young delivered a high ball back into the area. O'Hara failed to deal with it and one game after celebrating his 150th Chairboys appearance Jason McCarthy lashed home to send the terrace into raptures.

Hats off to the Cod Army's band of youngsters that resisted Wycombe up until the 94th minute.