

SATURDAY S PREMIERSHIP HEADLINE MAKERS

By Graham Lister, Chief Football Correspondent,
China Monitor (UK) Sports Division



Wycombe Wanderers' match-winning hero Roy Essandoh (left) celebrates the historic 2-1 victory over Leicester City with assistant manager Terry Gibson.

- **The FA Cup worked its famous magic again on Saturday as little Wycombe Wanderers from the Second Division defied the odds to eliminate Premiership high-fliers Leicester City and book a place in the semi-finals. If the 2-1 victory became an instant legend in lowly Wycombe s brief professional history, there was a real fairy tale surrounding the scorer of the winning goal.**

Roy Essandoh, who leapt higher than anyone else to head Wycombe s winner in the dying seconds of the tie, barely even knows the names of his jubilant team-mates. Because his squad was so badly depleted by injuries, particularly in the forward positions, Wycombe s manager Lawrie Sanchez appealed for a striker on the club s website.

The agent for Essandoh, a 25-year-old unemployed footballer in Finland, spotted the internet vacancy and phoned Sanchez to offer his client s services. Wycombe signed him on a two-week contract and he arrived less than a week before the Leicester tie. Sanchez brought him on a second-half substitute and now the Belfast-born striker, brought up in Ghana and previously employed only in Scottish and Finnish lower league football, has written his name into the FA Cup s romantic history.

Wycombe were full value for their win. Leicester lacked pace and urgency in the first-half, during which Steve Brown went closest to

scoring with a fierce drive that Simon Royce in the Leicester goal did well to save. After the restart Wycombe were again the more enterprising, and took the lead when defender Paul McCarthy headed home a Brown free-kick.

The goal roused Leicester and they equalised with a well-worked goal, Gerry Taggart freeing Darren Eadie down the left, whose cross was lifted into the net from close range by Muzzy Izzet. Immediately afterwards Izzet put Ade Akinbiyi through on goal for what would have been 2-1 to Leicester until Martin Taylor saved well in a one-on-one.

Wanderers refused to be put out of their stride, however, and should have had a penalty when Scott Oakes handled in the area. Sanchez was so incensed when the officials waved play on that he was sent from the dug-out but referee Steve Bennett. He was watching the closing minutes of the game on a TV monitor when Essandoh grabbed his moment of glory. Even then the drama was not over: Steve Brown, who had already received a yellow card, was sent off for collecting another after removing his shirt in the goal celebrations to reveal a message for his young son on his T-shirt.

So the recently-widowed Sanchez, scorer of Wimbledon's FA Cup winning goal against Liverpool in 1988, has now taken his team to the semi-finals and perhaps an even bigger slice of history.

- There was no similar upset at Highbury, the venue for Saturday's only other FA Cup quarter-final. Arsenal lined up against First Division promotion contenders Blackburn Rovers with both Patrick Vieira and Thierry Henry on the bench, resting slight injuries ahead of Wednesday's crucial Champions League showdown with Bayern Munich. But any doubts about their attitude to the game were removed when they raced into a 2-0 lead after just five minutes.

Lauren's shrewd pass to Robert Pires was neatly turned across the penalty area into the path of Sylvain Wiltord who swept the ball into the net first time with one minute 25 seconds on the clock. It was a sixth FA Cup goal this season for the Frenchman, who has now scored in every round.

The inventive Dennis Bergkamp then had a teasing effort cleared from a corner, from which Ashley Cole planted the ball onto the determined head of Tony Adams. The captain's header flew into the net to leave Blackburn with a mountain to climb.

Arsenal continued to torment them, particularly down the right wing where they enjoyed acres of space. In the 36th minute the Gunners increased their lead to three when Wiltord's pass was brilliantly controlled and guided into the net by Pires.

In the second-half Rovers reorganised defensively and looked a much better unit. They had an effort by Jason McAteer disallowed for handball and saw Marcus Bent volley against the post. Wiltord also went close for Arsenal who have now reached their 21st FA Cup semi-final. Only Manchester United (22) and Everton (23) have appeared in more.

- The two other FA Cup quarter-finals were scheduled for Sunday, with West Ham United entertaining Tottenham Hotspur in an all-Premiership London derby, and Liverpool travelling to Merseyside neighbours Tranmere Rovers who are anchored to the bottom of the First Division but who have become England's leading exponents of Cup giant-killing.
- There was just one fixture in the Premiership on Saturday, Aston Villa beating Ipswich Town 2-1. Villa were looking for only their third win in the last 16 games, and things looked bleak for them when Alun Armstrong put Ipswich ahead in the first-half.

But Julian Joachim eased the pressure on manager John Gregory with two coolly taken strikes in the second-half to secure the points.



Arsenal's Robert Pires scores the third goal in their 3-0 defeat of Blackburn Rovers.

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