

WIGAN PREPARES TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

— 23rd TIME LUCKY? —

FOUR years ago, Wigan Athletic were riding the crest of the wave—a gallant Cup failure against First Division side Newcastle behind them, and ahead the bright promise of admission to the Football League.

But things did not work out that way. At the annual meeting of the Football League, Wigan's application was rejected, and now those prosperous days of what will always be known as 'The Newcastle Era' are just a proud memory.

Since then, when Wigan could justly claim to be the prince of non-League sides, the crown has slipped a little, but the directors of this Lancashire Combination club claim that a new era is about to begin.

After four years of only moderate success, the Board has completely changed its policy on team-building. Whereas, up to this season, the wage bill has usually exceeded £150, it is now less than half, primarily because most of Wigan's playing staff is composed of young amateurs—the pick of local junior teams.

In fact, only seventeen of Wigan's seventy-seven players are part-timers—there are no full-time professionals—and this accounts for some of the disappointing results last season.

If and when the League clubs do recognise their claims, Wigan are prepared to spend, if necessary, thousands to strengthen their team.

They believe that this year is their year. They base this opinion on the assumption that struggling clubs at present in the Fourth Division might throw in the towel, beaten by the increased travelling expenses.

Even if that does not happen, Wigan argue that the League's policy on re-organisation seems to point to some alteration which will provide a loophole for prominent non-Leaguers.

THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THIS, WIGAN'S TWENTY-THIRD APPLICATION, WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.

The question everyone is asking is—what happened to Wigan? What has gone on during the last four years to turn a once thriving club into the struggling organisation it now is? Let the club's vice-chairman, Cllr. Walter Walsh, answer those questions:

"We have been the victims of circumstances," says Cllr. Walsh, who is also Chairman of Bolton Corporation's Transport Committee. "When the players we had four years ago went over the hill, we brought other experienced men to fill the gaps, but unfortunately we seldom seem to have hit upon the right players.

"On our books now we have many promising young players who need only the benefit of experienced colleagues to bring out the best in them.

"Of course, if we did obtain election

to the League," said fifty-year-old Cllr. Walsh, "we would improve our ground."

Since Ted Goodier left Wigan four years ago, the club has had ten managers. It is now managed by a former player, Jimmy Shirley, and the first and second team trainers, Sammy Lynn and Ken Banks, are also former players.

At the time the club was beginning its climb to fame in the early 1950s, a new member joined the Board—Mr. Sidney Littler, a wealthy businessman,

by ALLAN RIMMER

who is now Chairman of Wigan Athletic and the club's main shareholder.

It was mainly through Mr. Littler's financial assistance that the club recovered from the stunning blow of April, 1953, when the main stand was burned down.

He was largely responsible for the building of the fine new Phoenix Stand, which cost £22,000 to erect, seats 1,800 and covers a further 1,400.

This boosted the club's assets to their present figure of £30,000 and increased the ground's capacity to well over 35,000.

Wigan have won the Lancashire Combination Championship four times, the Combination Cup twice, the Lancashire Junior Cup three times, the Cheshire League Championship three times, and the Liverpool non-League Cup twice.

On Wigan's books at the time of writing, are only three players with League experience—Jimmy Prescott, 26, inside-left who has played with Southport and York City; left-winger Derek Leaver, 27, former Blackburn Rovers outside-left; and Bill Baird, a full-back who has played Scottish League football.

The rest are youngsters, teenagers like right-half Eddie Birchall, full-backs Gerry Baker and Joe Murphy, and left-half Derek Houghton.

And finally, from this Lancashire town, come these facts: Within a radius of seven miles of Springfield Park live 310,000 people; the town is on the main rail and road routes north; it has ample accommodation for visiting teams; it has a fine ground.

PROUD WIGAN:

Standing—Baker, Barrass, Houghton, Kirwen, Shepherd, Ryan. Sitting—Holt, Prescott, Smith, Birchall, Banks. Note: Barrass, Kirwen, Holt and Smith have left the club.



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