



Watford Website

Match Report

Watford were beaten 3-2 by Wycombe Wanderers as the hosts came from behind to win this evening's pre-season friendly.

A superb solo goal by Giorgi Chakvetadze gave the Hornets the lead before Wycombe levelled in strange fashion shortly before the break.

Two close range finishes sealed the victory for the home side in the second half, before Mileta Rajović grabbed one back in stoppage time.

Wesley Hoedt returned to the Hornets defence for the second-to-last friendly before the start of the Sky Bet Championship season, which was played in sweltering conditions at Adams Park.

Luke Leahy poked the ball into the net for the Chairboys with four minutes played but referee Craig Hicks had already blown up for a foul on Hornets keeper Jonathan Bond.

Wycombe enjoyed the better of the early going and Bond was needed to make a smart save as Leahy's header looked to cap a slick team move.

It was a crucial stop as the Hornets took full advantage by opening the scoring just moments later.

Chakvetadze, a lively presence in the visiting midfield in the opening minutes, drove past Wycombe bodies before thumping a finish back across Nathan Bishop and into the bottom corner.

The goal sparked life into the Hornets' display, with Chakvetadze charging forward on another trademark run and James Morris overlapping well to become a threat on the left flank.

Bond was called upon again, however, when Kieran Sadlier could only fire into his hands from close range.

Seventeen-year-old Leo Ramirez-Espain did not look out of place in midfield; the 17-year-old Academy hopeful not looking out of place after being handed another pre-season start by Cleverley.

On 36 minutes, a Tom Ince free-kick struck the Wycombe wall and nearly wrong-footed Bishop but he was able to claim.

Chakvetadze's lung-busting runs continued to defy the warm weather as half-time approached, before the hosts equalised in contentious circumstances.

With Hoedt down injured and Watford expecting play to stop, Hicks allowed Wycombe to continue and Beryly Lubala had the simplest of finishes as two players jogged up to Bond unchallenged.

Hoedt was immediately replaced by James Clarridge as the half ended all square, with Cleverley making three more changes during the interval.

The Hornets fell behind shortly after the break when Josh Scowen was on hand to tap home from close range after Bond clawed away a bending effort from Tyreeq Bakinson.

On the hour mark, Chakvetadze's superb outing continued with another run and pass which sent Ince away, but he was forced wide and had to settle for a corner.

Cleverley made another trio of changes but Bond was nearly beaten again when Leahy curled a free-kick against the crossbar.

Substitute Edo Kayembe drove well off target as the Hornets pressed for an equaliser, before Morris could only slice a back post volley into the stands.

The pressure was in vain as Wycombe scored their third when Leahy cannoned another shot off the bar, allowing Richard Kone to bounce home a header on the rebound.

There was still time for the hosts to hit the bar for a third time as the game reached its conclusion, before Rajović netted following a Bishop parry to reduce the arrears.

Kayembe let fly in search of a dramatic leveller but, when roared to shoot by the travelling fans, his effort thundered wide.

Tom Cleverley – Post Match Comments

Tom Cleverley admitted that Watford's performance in the [3-2 defeat to Wycombe Wanderers](#) was not where he wanted it to be, but believes the game offered a good test as the 2024/25 Sky Bet Championship season looms.

The Hornets were beaten in their penultimate pre-season friendly at Adams Park in a scrappy game that saw more youngsters earn first-team minutes.

After the match, the Head Coach said: "I don't think it was our best performance tonight - we have got a lot of work to do.

"The fixture is good for us because it could mirror what to expect in the first game of the season [against Millwall] so I feel like we can deal with that better.

"The second half especially, it is a really good test for six/seven of those younger lads who have probably not experienced that before.

"Sometimes it does get like this, teams are good at set-pieces, they stick it in your channels, they win second balls.

"I didn't think we were good enough in those areas tonight."

Leo Ramirez-Espain was one of those youngsters, with the 17-year-old playing over an hour having featured frequently throughout pre-season.

On the midfielder, Cleverley said: "He is very comfortable in possession, so these games are probably not what suits him best, he prefers it a little less rough and tumble.

"They need to experience this because league football is not as perfect as you would like it to be so these are good experiences.

"He is a player that I like and a player I like from the Under-18s."

Cleverley said he will not be handing out any freebies throughout the season to the youth players who have been involved.

"In pre-season the squad gets a little bit thin, so these young lads will have to earn those minutes," the former England international admitted.

"You want to get minutes into everyone's legs so that is how it is, they have done great and it's a different kind of experience tonight, and one they will learn from."

There were several absentees from the squad tonight but, again, Cleverley pointed to the nature of a pre-season.

"[Some of] the lads played on Saturday - you are trying to get minutes into everyone," he said.

"There was a training group this morning and that is what it has been like through the whole pre-season.

"On Saturday [against Brentford] we will probably play our cards a bit more."

Imrân Louza and Vakoun Bayo were two players who were part of that group, while Cleverley also provided an injury update on a few more Hornets.

"[Rocco] Vata sickness, [Francisco] Sierralta picked up a head injury in training yesterday, and [Ken] Sema rolled his ankle, but should be alright for Saturday," he said.

Another injury concern was on-field captain Wesley Hoedt, who had to be taken off just before half-time on his return to the starting 11.

"It was a hyper-extension of the knee," Cleverley explained. "It doesn't look too swollen in there and let's hope those are good signs."

One player who is back to full fitness is Giorgi Chakvetadze, who is raring to go after starting pre-season late having represented Georgia at Euro 2024.

He opened the scoring with a brilliant solo run and finish early-on in the first half, with Cleverley full of praise for the forward who he hopes can have a major impact throughout the season.

The Head Coach said: "It's a huge positive from the last few days to see Giorgi back and on top form.

"He's a player that I like. [He's] intelligent, has good positional awareness and has good quality on the ball.

"It is my job and our job as a staff to add goals and assists to those strong parts of his game.

"He is really enjoying the responsibility of that and enjoying the responsibility of a lot of our good play coming through him.

"He looks like someone who is massively motivated to impress, and he has definitely done that."

Chakvetadze's potential significance stems from the importance of the two number 10s in Cleverley's system, with the former joining Tom Ince in those roles this evening.

On the two positions, the Head Coach stated: "Our number 10s are pivotal in this - we want to get them in between the lines.

"If we can't get them in between the lines they have got a licence to drift centrally or wider.

"As long as they link together then, and don't leave the nine isolated, then that is fine is by me.

"I think Giorgi and Incey are two intelligent players who can play that role well."

Tom Ince – Post Match Comments

Tom Ince admits there are lessons to be learnt from [Watford's 3-2 defeat to Wycombe Wanderers](#), but won't be reading too much into pre-season results.

The forward played the full 90 in the Hornets' penultimate pre-season friendly, and has featured heavily throughout the new season's preparations.

Ince has been chomping at the bit to prove his worth after he found his first season with the club disappointing, and wants to show what he can do.

"I have been enjoying it - it has been nice to be getting some games," he told watfordfc.com.

"It was a difficult season for me last year, not really getting the chances I would have liked, it was tough.

"I came back in pre-season ready, hoping things might be different, and with Clevs' new formation I have found a little bit of a spot, so I'm just getting used to it."

The 32-year-old was disappointed by the defeat, but as a pre-season exercise, he found it a useful run-out for the whole squad.

"Pre-season games are always difficult, but the goal is to try, first and foremost, to get up to speed," Ince explained.

"We have got a lot of young players involved in our squad at the minute, and we are waiting for some players to come back.

"The results have not been what we wanted but it is about building performance."

The preparations for 2024/25 have been different compared to last year for Ince, when the new signing struggled throughout pre-season due to a reoccurring injury.

He was eager not to suffer the same fate again, and reported for this pre-season raring to go after feeling he wasn't able to truly announce himself to the Watford faithful in 2023/24.

Looking back, he said: "I felt like there were times when it was difficult [last pre-season] because I came with an injury and it felt like I was playing catch-up.

"From a personal point of view I felt I was not given the chances to shine; I started six games last year out of 46.

"I felt that if I was given more opportunities from the start and more of a run of games the fans might have been able to see the player that I am.

"That's gone - I can't change that. I have come back in pre-season ready, sharp, and I feel good."

Ince feels well-prepared for the season ahead thanks to the pre-season schedule, but still thinks there are a few elements of his game which need refining as the side continues to build towards the season opener at Millwall.

"There's still little bits I can sharpen up," he admitted. "That final little bit of finishing touches, but as long as you get the general fitness and you keep ticking over.

"Sometimes you need tests like that, because Wycombe today gives us the same test Millwall will give us in two weeks' time.

"It's physical, and we know we want to be with the ball, but the Championship is more than possession.

"You have to physically battle, you have to be prepared to battle with people who are going to be 6'4 like they were today.

"There are lessons that we have learnt here tonight, and ones that we have to take into the season ahead, and there are a few little wake-up calls.

"It is good that we get it now, rather than during the season, but we have enough confidence and quality in that dressing room to get together, and there will be full focus on Millwall.

"If we can go there and win that game, play out of our skin, then the last six/seven fixtures of pre-season mean nothing."