

Thaw dampens fans' festive fun

By CLAIRE NASH

THE weather denied thousands of Wycombe Wanderers and Rochdale fans long-awaited Christmas entertainment when the sides' Tuesday clash at Adams Park was called off.

A waterlogged pitch was caused by a thaw which followed a three-day deep freeze and a snowfall during Monday night. It has cost Wanderers between £4,000 and £5,000 in lost revenue, and made it a double whammy of blows over the extended holiday.

Stalwart Blues defender Matt Crossley was stretchered off with torn right knee ligaments during Wycombe's 1-1 draw at Torquay on Monday. He is expected to be out of action for at least three weeks which means he would miss Wycombe's FA Cup third round match against Norwich City.

Wanderers came under heavy fire from Rochdale fans. But it was match referee Arthur Smith's decision to postpone the game two hours before kick-off.

One woman vented her frustration on Martin O'Neill himself.

Rochdale supporter Wayne Skeffington said: "I left home at 2am this morning and travelled through snow drifts to get here. The pitch looked playable to me."

Wanderers secretary John Goldsworthy said: "It was the referee's decision. It was not just Rochdale fans who were disappointed. A lot of hard work goes into arranging games and we lose a lot of money which is never recovered."

Groundsman Jim Gardner spent seven hours working on the pitch despite having two broken wrists in plaster.



The match was still on at 9am when a local Football Association referee said the surface was still playable, although frosty. But a thaw melted frost under the pitch surface as well as the snow.

Skeffington thought the Football League should have given both clubs home derbies to avoid inconveniencing teams and fans so badly.

O'Neill also questioned why Wycombe were playing a side travelling hundreds of miles for the fixture, rather than a more local team.

A Football League spokesman said: "Clubs are asked if they want derby matches over the holiday period and only about half of them want them."

Wycombe's festive fixture pro-

gramme is due to continue, weather permitting, at Walsall tomorrow and against Hereford at Adams Park on Monday (ko 3pm).

Walsall have the same number of points as Wycombe. "I think the match against Walsall will be a difficult game for us as they lost at the weekend," said O'Neill.

Blues could secure their first League double against Hereford who they beat 4-3 in a nerve-racking game at Edgar Street in August.

● THE rearranged Rochdale fixture takes place on Tuesday, February 22 (ko 7.45pm). Tuesday's tickets are still valid but can be refunded if preferred.

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