League set to axe 44 clubs

By Aaron Gransby

Vauxhall-Opel second division faces chop

THE Vauxhall-Opel League is set to sensationally axe 44 clubs by disbanding its entire second division.

The move, which is almost certain to go ahead before the end of the season, could affect the futures of Wembley, Kingsbury Town and Edgware Town.

At two separate meetings last week, the league's member clubs were told of the plan to reduce the league from four to two divisions by dropping both Division Two North and Division Two South.

The reasons given were that the league, which currently has 88 clubs, was too unwieldy and the standards had fallen since the four divisional system was introduced at the start of season 1984-85.

The league's 44 full member clubs — those in the premier and first divisions — met last Wednesday and discussed the suggestion. The majority supported it.

Two days later the associate members of the league — the second division clubs — met and vowed to fight the plan.

Although there has been no final decision yet, the odds are stacked heavily against the minnows. Each full member club has one vote at league meetings; the associate members have just six votes between them.

League chairman Alan Turvey said: "We have heard the views of all the clubs and it is fair to say that both meetings had different outlooks on the situation. The matter will be discussed further at a management committee meeting on January 22."

A final decision can only be taken at a general meeting of all clubs. A two-thirds majority of votes would be needed to carry out the plan.

First division clubs Wembley and Kingsbury Town were both represented at last week's initial meeting and neither is happy with the idea.

Wembley chairman Eric Stringer abstained when the vote was taken. He told the Observer: "I think it would be a pity if it happened. A lot of people at a lot of clubs have put a lot of work into getting into the league. I shall be sorry if it happens."

Kingsbury Town chairman Mark Hart voted against the suggestion. "I think the league would be better off with just two divisions, but I think there is a matter of principle involved here.

"Clubs have spent a lot of money on their grounds just to be called Vauxhall-Opel League clubs and it is not right for us to turn our backs on them," he said.

Premier division Harrow Borough had two representatives at the meeting, chairman Eric May and secretary Peter Rogers.

Both refused to disclose which way Borough had voted. Eric May said: "As far as I am concerned it was a closed meeting and the way we voted is not for publication.

"It was just an informal meeting of premier and first division clubs at which the majority decided to vote for the split."

Were either Wembley or Kingsbury to suffer relegation or problems with their ground grading, they could be out of the league. And Edgware Town, who have missed out on Vauxhall-Opel League status for a heart-breaking four years in a row, now look sure to once again, despite leading the Spartan League.

Sport on four pages

Inside

Page 109 — Youth soccer; Pool league; Results round-up

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Next week

THE second round draw for the Middlesex Pairs Darts Championship is taking place this week. See next week's Observer for full details.

Senior league could rise from ashes

● Peter Clayton — "New competition would be welcomed"

● Russell Grant — negotiating sponsorship

A NEW senior Middlesex league could be formed if the Vauxhall-Opel League decide to axe its second division, writes Aaron Gransby,

Moves were made this week to turn the dream of a senior local league incorporated into the non-League pyramid into a reality.

If it comes off, the new league will feed into either the new streamlined Vauxhall-Opel League or the Beazer homes (Southern) league.

Several Middlesex clubs have contacted the county football association to ask about the possibility and senior county figures have been working non-stop to get the idea off the ground.

On Monday night, Middlesex FA vice-chairman Freddie Griggs addressed a meeting of the current Middlesex County League to inform the clubs of the plans.

The current league is an intermediate, not a senior league, and the new senior division would simply extend the existing framework.

New Middlesex county FA secretary Peter Clayton said: "It is not up to us to comment on the actions of the Vauxhall-Opel League, but we must address ourselves to the problems that face our clubs.

"Several of them have recently entered the Vauxhall-Opel League and invested heavily in ground improvements. We would not wish to see that investment wasted so we have agreed to accept an invitation to meet the clubs next Wednesday."

It is not only clubs currently in the Vauxhall-Opel League that are looking expectantly towards the new league. It would almost certainly draw in the clubs from the existing feeders which are fed up with the current travelling involved in their own leagues.

"Other clubs have indicated that they would welcome a competition concentrated in Middlesex which boast a large number of senior clubs," said Peter Clayton.

Interest has also been shown by the number of clubs just outside Middlesex who are now seeking an alternative league.

Locally, Edgware Town chairman John Cook emerged from a meeting of his club's committee to say: "Being a progressive club, Edgware are always looking to join a stronger league in terms of both football and ground facilities. as long as such a league is in the pyramid system, we would certainly be interested."

Edgware currently head of the Spartan League and would be applying join the Vauxhall-Opel League for next season. If the move to drop its second division goes through, they would have to stay in the Spartan League or move elsewhere.

Rayners Lane this week revealed that they too would be willing to consider a new county league.

Chairman Tom Lynn said: "We would certainly view a Middlesex league with possibility. We would be interested and will go to the meeting on it next week."

Lane would not be excluded because they do not have floodlights. Peter Clayton said.

"The object of the league would be to provide floodlight football for senior clubs, but Rayners Lane would not be excluded. It would just mean a bit of juggling about with fixtures."

The county FA has its own senior status and grounds committee, and ground grading standards would be kept high.

The present Middlesex County League would become a second division beneath the senior clubs. Promotion would be possible, but only if a club's ground was up to the required standard.

Russell Grant, astrologer and Middlesex campaigner, is also involved with and supporting the new venture.

He is currently negotiating with a top Middlesex company to provide sponsorship for the new league if its to get of the ground.

The county FA consider that between 18-20 clubs would be needed to form the new league and the indications are that such a degree of support would be forthcoming.

The only stumbling block would be its place in the pyramid. But Peter Clayton confirmed: "We are investigating this with the Football Association and all the signs are optimistic."

Soccer fixtures

Saturday January 16

GM Vauxhall Conference: Weymouth v Wealdstone.

Vauxhall Opel League Premier Division: Harrow Borough v St Albans City (Earlsmead, 3pm).

Vauxhall Opel League Division One: Kingsbury Town v Bracknell Town (Silver Jubilee Park, 3pm), Wembley v Stevenage Borough (Vale Farm, 3pm).

Monday January 18

Vauxhall Opel League Premier Division: Bognor v Harrow Borough.

Tuesday January 19

AC Delco Cup: Barking v Wembley.

Wednesday January 20

Spartan League Cup: Edgware v Hanwell Town (White Lion ground, 7.30pm).

Vauxhall Opel League Division One: Kingsbury Town v Hampton (Silver Jubilee Park.

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Bowgett and Byatt miss out on seaside trip

WEALDSTONE face a tough trip to Weymouth on Saturday in their fight to avoid relegation from the GM Vauxhall Conference.

Weymouth are chasing promotion to the Barclays League but were recently beaten at their new Wessex Stadium ground by Harrow Borough in an FA Trophy replay.

Stones will be without both Dennis Byatt and Paul Bowgett. Bowgett, who played against Wycombe last week, has now had his broken nose set and will be out for a couple of weeks. New loan signing from Banbury, Ian Bowyer, will replace him.

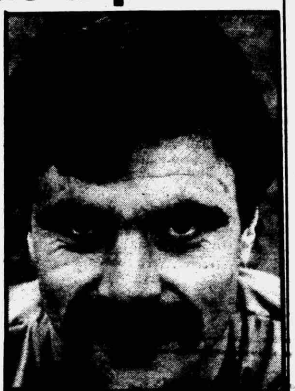
Tony Lynch could also miss the game as he has a groin strain.

Harrow Borough skipper Trevor How pulled a hamstring against Bishops Stortford last week and misses Borough's home clash with St Albans on Saturday.

But Paul Morris returns from suspension and should play. Steve Scott broke down in training on Monday and his comeback will be delayed for around three weeks. Phil Dicker will also be out — he has a foot injury.

On Monday night, Borough travel to Bognor Regis Town for a re-arranged Vauxhall-Opel League match.

Wembley entertain Stevenage Borough still without the holidaying Lance Cadogan. But new signing Gary Dolling will be available after missing the midweek Middlesex Charity Cup win at Ruislip Manor.



● Paul Bowgett — out for two weeks with a broken nose.

Kingsbury Town will be without Bobby Hutchinson who has an ankle injury for their game with Bracknell, while both **Edgware Town** and **Rayners Lane** have a clean bill of health for their matches at Brimsdown and Abingdon Town respectively.

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