

HOWARD KENNEDY a member of Wycombe Wanderers recent touring party to Italy, reflects on the differences between the English and Latin lifestyles.

FROM the moment Wycombe's tour party were met at Lamezia airport by the officials of host club Cosenza one could not fail to be impressed by the efforts which had gone into making the second Giji Peronace Memorial Cup a success.

However, during the trip one did have occasion to raise a wry smile at the different approach to life of the local Italian people compared to our own in Bucks.

The enthusiasm displayed by the Italian people for their football would certainly dismay the English football Association considering the present parlous state of our own national game.

The spectators paid £7.15 for the privilege of watching Wycombe which may seem highly exorbitant to some of our regular supporters!

However, when one considered the stadium, the entertainment (bands, majorettes and concert afterwards), the weather and the excellent peaceful atmosphere one began to appreciate the value received for the money spent.

Displays of delight

Football matches are certainly a social occasion for all the family and it was possible to feel that the match itself was incidental to the locals' enjoyment if one had not witnessed their spectacular displays of delight when the home team scored.

Enormous flags were waved, bonfires were lit on the terraces and fireworks flared high into the night sky.

Apart from having a national newspaper devoted entirely to football this sport seemed to take up a great deal of time on television.

Wycombe's first game against Cosenza was televised live on Southern Italian Television as was the final between Padua and Cosenza.

This was supplemented with an hour long programme on the day following the match which consisted of interviews with players and officials and numerous action replays.

The programme was watched with great interest and, although the presentation left a bit to be desired, it was good to see Gary Lester's saves replayed numerous times and also to watch Alan Davies struggle to understand the interpreter's English.

Wycombe players became celebrities overnight and on arriving at the coast 30 miles away on their rest day were immediately surrounded by local autograph hunters chanting "Quatro-zero" (4-0)!

Dangerous

The host city of Cosenza was an industrial town set in a wide plain surrounded on every side by the impressive Calabrian mountains.

However, the town itself betrayed its idyllic setting. When venturing on foot to explore the city the players were requested to return to their hotel as local people told them the town was too dangerous and that there had been many shootings there recently.

This suggestion of violence coincided with the frequent references to the exploits of the Mafia who were cited as the reason that there were no bars open after 10pm.

This fact led the whole party to have a 'dry' evening on the Saturday which, after just having played football in very high temperatures seemed a painful penance for losing!

It was a pleasure for the tour party to return with many impressive gifts but the most memorable advantage of such a venture must be that through the medium of sport many contacts and friendships were formed in the South of Italy and Wycombe is now a name which I am sure will always receive a warm welcome should they ever return to this part of Europe.