

England role for Blues' coach

NEWBURY coach Ben Ryan is on the point of being called into the England set-up as assistant coach to the England Counties side.

The squad of National League players is embarking on a tour of Argentina in June that will include matches against provincial sides before playing its first official test against the Uruguay

national XV, ranked 18 in the world.

Newbury's Mal Roberts, Rob Faulkner and Neil Collins have been regular members of the squad and Simon Carter also earned a call-up to the squad that played France Amateurs at Newbury earlier this season.

The appointment is likely to be

rubber-stamped by Twickenham today (Thursday) and the RFU's operations director Terry Burwell said: It is a tribute to what Ben has done at Newbury this season, and more importantly the way he has got them to play and the vision he has of the game.

"We have recognised just what he has done and it a tribute to

himself and the club for the steps they have taken to progress and secure promotion."

And Burwell, formerly director of rugby at Newbury, added: "I wish them all the best on Saturday at Stourbridge."

THE FINAL PUSH

ONE LAST shove, and the job's done!

That is the message from Newbury coach Ben Ryan as Blues head for Stourbridge determined to end their nine-month promotion push with the victory that will secure their place in National League One next season.

Having been denied that target by Moseley's win at Manchester two weeks ago while Newbury were beating Bracknell, Saturday's position is straightforward - a win will do it, regardless of what Moseley do against Waterloo.

But Ryan also wants Blues to clinch their prize in style. "A three point win would be enough," he said, "but that would take the edge off the celebrations a little.

"We want to clinch promotion

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playing the style of rugby that has got us where we are. We have a fully fit squad, we have sorted out the little problems we have had in recent weeks and we are going there to win and get the job done."

Stourbridge have an atrocious home record, but Ryan still has respect for the midlanders. "The scoreline flattered us when we beat them 42-13 at home earlier in the season," he said.

"But our finishing was clinical and we got to get back to that."

Ryan admits that his side has suffered from 'white line fever' in recent weeks when Blues have not quite fired on all cylinders in some games. "We have had it 90 metres

out," he said, "trying to rush through to score from the first phase.

"So it is back to basics on Saturday. I am not putting down Stourbridge, but we are going there to win and I do not foresee any problems.

"We don't want to see winning promotion have to go to the last game of the season.

"We want that to be a proper party to celebrate."

Injury victims Glenn Cooper, Will Green and Luke Walters are all fully fit, Mal; Roberts and Andrew Smith are free from army duties and Blues are only waiting for Andy Tibbetts to come through last night's (Wednesday's) game for the RAF against the Navy at Monks Lane.



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Sunday service for Blues next year?

SUNDAY rugby could be on the agenda next season if Newbury take the anticipated step into National League One.

Clubs at the higher level can opt to play their home fixtures any time between Friday evening and Sunday, and Newbury's Ben Ryan believes that is something the club should investigate during a revamp of its marketing operations.

"I would like to see a marketing man in place to put more bums on seats," he said.

"And I would like us to take a look at playing on a Sunday as well.

"We can play at any time between Friday night and Sunday," he added, "but I don't fancy Friday because of the effect it would have on our part-time players.

"But playing on a Sunday is a good idea. It would enable players from other clubs to watch us in National League One and I think it is something that we should look at very, very seriously"

Newbury's committee has already upped

Blues' playing budget substantially for next season, although it would remain at the bottom scale of clubs in Division One. However, that could all change, depending upon future sponsorship levels and

Blues bandwagon rolls again

BLUES fans will again be out in force at Stourbridge for Saturday's clash at Stourton Park.

The club's official transport has sold out but hundreds more are expected to make the trip.

"It's only a short drive up the M5," said club president David Smith. "The support was superb at our last game and it is incredible to think of the way it has grown in response to what Ben and the team have done.

"And it will be a good place to celebrate," he added. "Stourbridge are a good rugby club with good facilities and I know that they will be very hospitable to us if we clinch promotion there.

"And then we plan to have a proper promotion party when we play Wharfedale!"

development plans at the club that could include additional terracing and cover.

And Ryan is also close to completing his squad plans for next season and is just

waiting for the financial go-ahead. "I have the make-up of my squad almost decided," he said, "and as soon as we have everything settled we will be all-set."



Thatcham primed for promotion push next time around

THATCHAM Town chairman Phil Holdway has indicated that the club WILL apply for promotion next season as he strives to keep ambitious manager Jason Braidwood at Waterside Park.

Braidwood said last week that he would speak to other clubs if Thatcham repeated this season's stance of not

applying to be promoted out of the Wessex League.

Town were due to take on Abingdon United in the Berks and Bucks Senior Trophy final last night, the first of three finals for the club. Speaking on the eve of that clash, Holdway said: "I have got to sit down in a few weeks with Jason and Steve

Melledew (Chief Executive). A lot has been made of this. We will be applying but we want to discuss it at committee level first.

"We are all at the club to better ourselves otherwise we would not be there. But we have got to keep within the budgets of the club.

"We have got finals coming up and we do not want to be distracted from them.

Braidwood has led Thatcham to a fine third place in the Wessex League as well as three cup finals in his first season.

But last week he did admit an interest in the Winchester

City job if he was offered it. However, Holdway wants to keep him at Waterside Park.

"I have worked with Jason for a number of years and do not see a problem," he said. "He has been brilliant and is the best manager in the league."