

## Bartlett's greatest achievement

### Wealdstone secure promotion a year after manager considered resigning

Wealdstone manager Gordon Bartlett insists guiding the Stones to the Ryman Premier Division title is his greatest achievement - less than a year after almost resigning because he did not think he could rebuild the club.

The Stones boss contemplated leaving last May after the heartbreak of losing in the play-offs and seeing a half a dozen of his squad depart.

Bartlett had his doubts but was persuaded to stay on for a 19th season at Wealdstone and his team clinched the title and promotion to the Conference South after a 1-0 win at Margate on Tuesday night.

Bartlett said: "I nearly resigned in May when I was at a real low after our play-off defeat to Concord Rangers.

"There were financial reasons after losing six players and I just didn't know if I could rebuild the side. But my coaching staff backed me and convinced me to go again and you don't do things in life without good people around you. It's a people's club.

"I'm obviously delighted that I stayed now but you can't tell me anyone that doesn't have doubts when they consider where their future lies.

"I didn't think it was possible for us to achieve this when we lost 4-0 to Uxbridge in pre-season and didn't win our first three games. There were so many doubters at that point.

He added: "People have stuck with us through thick and thin. We have lots of doubters and setbacks but to achieve this now makes it all the more rewarding. We have had a lot of difficult times and sometimes people give up but we haven't and have got the reward. It is a good lesson in life."

When Bartlett joined the club they were languishing in Ryman Division Three but four promotions have secured a place in the sixth tier of English football.

Bartlett said: "This has got to rank as the highest achievement I've had as a manager. I've been to Wembley with Yeading but this ranks above that because it is the culmination of five years work since the club moved to Ruislip. We've got a home and a heartbeat and now that heartbeat is absolutely throbbing.

"We have come from the depths of the Ryman League. We have now had four promotions and we can relax, enjoy the last three games and the Middlesex Senior Cup final against Hampton and Richmond Borough.

"We want to celebrate with as many people as possible because it's very much a fans' club."

The Stones have won 93 points with



The Stones players celebrate their championship triumph after sealing promotion to the Conference South while Tom Hamblin, left, pops open the champagne. Picture: STEVE FOSTER/WEALDSTONE FC

three games remaining and the manager is full of admiration for his squad.

Bartlett said: "It's the best group of players I've ever had without a shadow of a doubt. It's undoubtedly the best team and also the best spirit we've had in 28 years of coaching. To lose four games in 43 league matches is pretty incredible and we have had no midweek defeats all season."

The Stones were already heading for the title, due to Bognor Regis Town's defeat, but a late goal at Margate from Charlie Penny was the

crowning glory.

Bartlett said: "I think it was very important for everyone involved to have this moment.

"We could have won the title without having a result but for Charlie to score just suited the occasion.

"For so many fans to have travelled there was fantastic and they did not stop singing. It was a precious moment.

"We had about 250 fans with us and when we scored the winner the roof came off. It was a great moment."

The Stones' promotion party will continue at home to Kingstonian on Saturday while the trophy is expected to be lifted on Saturday, April 26 when they entertain Canvey Island.

● Harrow Borough snatched a last minute winner at Hendon on Monday as they claimed a 2-1 victory.

Leon Smith fired Hendon in front during the second half before Victor Osobu levelled in the 74th minute.

The Reds struck in the 90th minute through Stephen Butterworth.

Boro travel to Cray Wanderers on Saturday.



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