

# SPORT

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## STONES boss resigns after Chelmsford defeat 1995-2017: Bartlett steps down from Wealdstone

THE end of one of the longest eras in modern-day football ended this week, as Gordon Bartlett's legendary tenure at Wealdstone - pre-dating the Millennium Bug, the birth of Dele Alli and even Gazza's dentist chair celebration - drew to a close.

The breaking point proved to be Saturday's 2-0 home defeat to Chelmsford United, which left the Stones outside the National League South relegation zone on goal difference, with their ambitious expectations tempered by four points in their opening five games.

Tributes have streamed in to Bartlett from all corners of the football fraternity about a job he wishes he could continue in - but concedes now might be the right moment to pass on the baton as the longest-serving manager in English football.

"I feel it's probably the right time," he said. "I wish it could've been me who could carry on and turn it round."

"I've been offered another position with the club - I've been there for 22 years, and I want it to do well."

"Peter spoke to me over the weekend and it was finished on Monday. Saturday's result did us no good."

"At the end of the day, it's a results

By Ron Walker

business. Last Monday, we were unfortunate but on Saturday we were beaten by the better side.

"It's been humbling already with the messages I've received, personally and on social media. The reaction has been incredible, particularly from fellow managers and ex-players."

The Stones have moved quickly to bring in their first new boss since 1995 - with some questions raised over the timing of the appointment of Bobby Wilkinson, who resigned from Hungerford Town two days before Bartlett's resignation.

An as-yet undefined role upstairs as been offered to the 61-year-old, but he is going to take his time before deciding on his next move.

He said: "I've spoken about working with the club, but that depends on the new manager, and how we can manage that for all parties."

"If I can help take Wealdstone to the next level, then so be it but if not then there might be another challenge for me."

Bartlett said goodbye to his players on Monday night, coinciding their meeting with Wealdstone's



After 22 years Wealdstone and Gordon Bartlett have parted company, with the 61-year-old mulling over a new role at the club. Picture: ALAN PALMER

press release which revealed the news to the world.

An emotional farewell was always on the cards, and the last of the manager's hundreds of dressing room speeches will not go down as his best-delivered.

He said: "The reaction of the players was amazing. I walked into the dressing room and was fine before I

said I was leaving. Looking at them and into their eyes, that was emotional."

"There was a sense of disappointment and I shook everyone by the hand and they gave me a round of applause which didn't help."

"When you have been standing there for 22 years, it wasn't my finest delivery."

## Wilkinson takes on the reins

**HIGHLY-RATED HUNGERFORD BOSS APPOINTED AS STONES MANAGER**

**HIGHLY-RATED** Bobby Wilkinson has been named as Wealdstone's first new manager this century, with the former Hungerford Town boss taking over less than 24 hours after Gordon Bartlett's resignation.

The 40-year-old has turned heads in non-league after guiding Hungerford to sixth place in the National League South on a shoestring budget last year, and accrued a 70-per-cent win ratio across his eight years in charge, winning two promotions in that time.

He shocked the Crusaders on Saturday by resigning immediately after their defeat to Welling United, and said he wanted to recharge his batteries before his next move.

But within three days, he was back in a job after accepting chairman Peter Marsden's offer to become manager of the Stones.

He said: "I am incredibly excited to be coming to Wealdstone. Can I say straightaway that this is going to be about togetherness, passion and the future - all things I know the Stones fans are about."

"I have had a fantastic time at Hungerford but we are coming to Wealdstone to give it our all and I am looking forward to the challenges ahead and to put a smile on faces."

The new boss' first test will be a trip to Eastbourne Borough on Saturday, on the back of an open training session at Grosvenor Vale at 7.30pm tonight.

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