

# SPORT

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## Stones suffer play-off agony after taking Cards to the wire

WEALDSTONE were a stone's throw away from the National League South play-off final but were the victims of a dramatic Woking comeback on Sunday afternoon at Kingfield as they fell to an agonising 3-2 defeat.

First-half goals from Wealdstone defenders Freddie Grant and Connor Stevens gave Stones fans belief but second-half efforts from Moussa Diarra, Max Kretzschmar and Jake Hyde knocked Wealdstone out of the promotion chase.

The semi-final began got off to a frantic start and Stones broke the deadlock inside three minutes.

Grant was picked out at the back post by Danny Green's corner from the right and the full-back fiercely headed the ball past Woking keeper Craig Ross, sparking jubilation among the more than 600 visiting fans.

Woking needed a positive response after the Stones' fast start, Kretzschmar attempted to provide the equaliser but his first-time shot from distance was saved by stand-in Bracknell goalkeeper Mark Scott after 16 minutes.

Wealdstone were in dreamland four minutes later when another corner from Green, this time from the left, was volleyed home by Stevens inside the penalty area to double the lead.

By Dec O'Reilly

The Cards got their first decent opportunity of the game when Coventry City loanee Reise Allassani forced a great save from Scott just after the half-hour mark.

The crowd inside the Laithwaite Stadium grew tense as the game lacked chances for either side while Woking maintained the majority of possession towards the end of the first half.

Bobby Wilkinson's men maintained their two-goal cushion until the break, looking comfortable and at ease with the occasion.

It seemed as if Woking had a mountain to climb in order to turnaround the deficit, Kretzschmar provided an opportunity for the Cards when the winger's corner from the right found Jack Cook who disappointedly headed over the bar.

Kretzschmar was behind the bulk of Woking's positivity in the second half and just after the hour-mark his corner from the left found Ben Gerring who slammed his header onto the bar.

That chance looked to have been the Cards' best route back into the game and with time dwindling the home supporters at Kingfield looked deflated, as they believed their chance of a comeback had



Bobby Wilkinson's Wealdstone side pushed themselves to the limit against Woking.

been squandered.

However, the game sprung back into life when Kretzschmar's corner from the left found Diarra, who headed past Scott to halve Wealdstone's lead.

The situation was not ideal for Stones, who had played a hard-fought 90 minutes at Bath only four days earlier, while Woking had earned a week off after finishing in second place in National League South.

Alan Dowson's men gained both

momentum and confidence and equalised in the 86th minute when a quick free-kick routine saw the ball arrive at the feet of Kretzschmar who made no mistake inside the penalty area to convert a fine finish. Stones were on the back foot as the scores were level heading towards stoppage time, with the possibility of extra-time looming.

Stones full-back Rhys Tyler had an audacious volley from distance a minute before additional time which flew towards the goal but did

not trouble Ross, who caught comfortably.

As Wealdstone fought to hold on, the heartbreak of a third Woking goal came two minutes into injury time when Hyde was headed through on goal and he lofted the ball agonisingly over Scott.

Stones had given everything and left nothing on the pitch but Woking's class showed late on in the tie and had undone the visitors' hard work in the space of the final 15 minutes.

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