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FOOTBALL: New boss praises squad after draw



Wealdstone celebrate their win over FC Halifax Town on Saturday. Image: Jon Taffel

Noble hails spirit and heart of Wealdstone

DAVID Noble was pleased with the 'spirit and heart' his Wealdstone team showed after they battled to a 3-3 draw with Aldershot Town in his first game in charge.

Noble, who took over from Stuart Maynard as Stones boss last week, saw his side battle back from 2-0 down to take a share of the spoils, in their National League clash.

Wealdstone had it all to do after two goals in four minutes from Jack Barham and Lorent Tolaj put the visitors 2-0 up inside 24 minutes.

But quickfire replies from Sean Adarkwa and Nathan Ferguson made it 2-2 before half-time and Micah Obiero then put Stones ahead for the first time in the game.

However, Wealdstone were reduced

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to ten men when Aaron Henry was sent off after picking up a second booking, with 10 minutes remaining.

And Kwame Thomas then levelled for Aldershot in stoppage time before Wealdstone finished the game with nine men, after Mason Barrett was shown a straight red card for a foul in the final seconds.

Noble, who was appointed last week after leaving St Albans City, told the Wealdstone website: "It was a hectic game and a good game for the neutral - they certainly got their money's worth tonight."

"It was a little bit frustrating for a

manager but on the whole, I think I'd take a point.

"I was impressed by the quality on show.

"Not the best start obviously, first 15 minutes being 2-0 down. But the spirit and the heart of the boys, quick as a flash we were back to 2-2 with two beautiful goals.

"The first from Sean and then Fergie's goal was a really, really good goal with the movement from Sean and then Fergie running in behind and a really nice pass from Barks (Charlie Barker).

"Fergie took it beautifully, I was delighted to get back level pegging and then we take the lead with a brilliant finish from Micah, getting on that second ball and putting the keeper under pressure.

"It was a really good finish and at that point you're hoping we're going to hang on for the three.

"We had two really, really good chances to get that fourth and kill the game but it wasn't to be and they got a bit of momentum.

"We went down to ten men and then it was a bit of a struggle.

"We had to go to two banks of four and one and tried to be hard to beat and I thought we defended really, really well for a spell but it was disappointing to give that one away."

Goals from Aaron Henry and Tahvon Campbell earned Stones a 2-0 win over FC Halifax Town, as Alex Dyer took charge, last weekend.

They now focus on a trip to rivals Barnet at The Hive on Saturday (3pm).

Borthwick: England up for battle with Italy

COACH RELISHING ANOTHER SIX NATIONS CHALLENGE

STEVE Borthwick insists England's battle-hardened players are ready for the Guinness Six Nations as a result of facing greater club demands than any of their rivals.

Borthwick's 36-man squad have comfortably racked up the highest number of minutes played since the World Cup due to Gallagher Premiership and European commitments.

But while they will enter the Six Nations depleted by a greater workload - they have accumulated over two hours of game time more per player than next highest France - Borthwick believes they have benefited from the competitiveness of English clubs.

Six Premiership teams have reached the knockout phase of the Investec Champions Cup while the domestic league itself is more compelling than ever following its reduction in teams. "The players are match-hardened, so that's a great benefit. Generally I will try to look at the positive side and I have a group of players that are match-hardened. They are ready to go," Borthwick said.

"The other thing is the nature of the Premiership. All of the games are counting so the leverage of all these games is huge.

"And there have been teams fighting in Europe to get qualification, fighting to find a way to win which, again, is a real positive.

"Everything we're getting is saying all the clubs are running more than they were 12 months ago, so that's a real positive."

England may enter Saturday's opener against Italy in a fitter state than they were at the equivalent stage in 2023, but Premiership duty will not have equipped them for breakdown and contact area demands of a Six Nations.

And Borthwick has also told his players that there is a minimum requirement every time they pull on a Red Rose jersey.

"The Six Nations is a real contest. It's breakdown contest game so we need to ensure we've got that running right as well as the level of repeatability around the contact area," he added.

"We are going to improve as a rugby team. We will get tactically and technically better, and we will get fitter."

"The supporters also need to see that this team fights all the time, is competitive all the time and plays at the intensity required in an England team."

"That is the base standard and if you have that, you can add the technical and tactical elements that will then follow."