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FOOTBALL: Boss laments loss at Rochdale



Wealdstone players appeal for offside at Rochdale. Image: Jon Taffel

Noble: Stones must be tougher to play against

WEALDSTONE boss David Noble conceded his side's performance in a 3-0 defeat at Rochdale on Tuesday wasn't up to scratch - suggesting his players were blown away by the intensity of the contest.

A 20-minute first-half flurry of strikes from defender Ethan Ebanks-Landell and a double from Cian Hayes just before the break saw the home side race away from Noble's men without reply.

"It's a long trip. We don't want to make excuses, but I don't think we started the worst," said a clearly disappointed Noble.

"I think we settled well in the first 10 or 15 minutes, but then we sort of got blown away in 15 or 20 minutes.

By Tom Norton

"It was difficult, but we've got to do the basics better. We weren't staying with runners. We weren't winning the first ball in the box, and we got punished."

When asked about the intensity of the match, Noble admitted his players may have run out of steam by half-time due to the nature of the game.

"It's a difficult scoreline in that moment - 3-0 at half-time, he game's virtually done," he added.

"We've come, and it's 0-0 in the second half, but they're 3-0 up - the game's won.

Noble was also questioned about his decision to replace captain Jack Cook and Aaron Henry at half-time, and it seemed he needed to do something in order to soften the blow on his players.

"It was difficult. There could have been three or four changes there," he said.

"We wanted to get some fresh legs on and we've got to start digging in. We've got to be more difficult to play against, first and foremost."

The encouraging signs for Noble and his coaching staff were that Rochdale didn't manage to add to their tally in the second half.

But despite an improved perfor-

mance in the second period, Noble was keen to point out the game was already over by that point.

"There's still a fight there. There has to be, or without fighting, you're struggling," he said.

On Rochdale sitting back in the second half and soaking up Wealdstone pressure, the Stones' boss simply replied: "They're 3-0 up."

Another damaging defeat on the road leaves Noble's players in 18th place and without a win in six in the National League.

But a trip to fellow strugglers York City on Saturday may offer some respite after a tricky run against some of the league's better sides.

Lacklustre Harrow lose again

SURVIVAL HOPES HIT BY DEFEAT TO WINCHESTER CITY

A frustrating and disappointing loss to Winchester City has plunged Harrow Borough deeper into the relegation mire. Four games without defeat heading into the Southern League Premier Division South game at Earlsmead had at least given supporters something to cling on to.

The 2-1 loss, however, means they are still second from bottom and now nine points shy of safety with just 11 games to go. Harrow could have been four goals down after an underwhelming first half.

As it was, they could count themselves hugely fortunate to limit it to just 1-0. Under the cosh from the opening minute, they didn't help themselves either, Harry Seabrook slicing Ik Hill's low cross over his own bar in the fourth minute and Tyler Tobin fumbling a Oliver Balmer shot.

That was fortunately cleared by a covering defender but despite Excellence Muhemba getting a shooting chance, the pressure was never truly relieved. Hill turned Barsa Mirtahmasebi inside out on his next foray into the Harrow area but the resultant shot was deflected behind. Jamie Barron then found himself in yards of space at the back post from another corner but his volley was blocked inside the six-yard box and cleared.

It was always a matter of when and not if a goal would come and it duly arrived in the 21st minute, a poor clearing header landing at the feet of Balmer 12 yards out and he made no mistake.

Any hope that would serve as a catalyst for Harrow soon evaporated as Winchester continued to come forward. Dan Jones forced a good save from Tobin a couple of minutes later and then a Hill run and shot was stopped by a desperate challenge.

The charmed life continued until the interval, the best chance turned away by the legs of Tobin.

The break did give Harrow the chance to regroup but two minutes into the second period, Winchester and Balmer scored again, the striker three yards out and with no red shirt seemingly in the same postcode.

Staggeringly, Harrow reduced the gap to one just five minutes later.

A goalmouth scramble in the visitors' box ended when the linesman flagged to say the ball had crossed the line, with James Gurteen and Reece Cameron both laying claim to the final touch.

Harrow's cause was helped moments later when Hill was forced to leave the field with an injury.

But there wasn't really any other moments of hope for Harrow in the remaining 40 minutes or so, rather further opportunities for Winchester to add to their lead.

The battle to stay at step three moves on to Bracknell Town on Saturday.