

SPORT

Read the latest sports news at
harrowtimes.co.uk/sport

FOOTBALL: Second-half display pleases Taylor



Wealdstone's Sam Ashford on the ball at Solihull Moors during their 1-1 draw

Image: Jon Taffel

Stones boss can draw positives from changes

WEALDSTONE head coach Matt Taylor said his side will need to improve on their first-half performances after rallying for a 1-1 draw at Solihull Moors on Saturday.

An own goal drew Taylor's side level after Solihull marksman James Gale had opened the scoring just before the break.

But the boss admitted the opening periods of the game had not gone the way he might have imagined.

"First half, I felt we never really got any rhythm. We didn't get to our strength, which is our football," he told the club website.

"We were too easy to play through, I felt. The goal comes from a mistake that we make, and then from a set play we don't mark as well as we should.

By TOM NORTON
londoncommunity@newsquest.co.uk

"As a coach or as a manager, you've got to try and solve problems, and we weren't good enough in the first half.

"I changed the shape in the second half and made some changes. I thought the two boys that came on - Jack (Wells-Morrison) and Callum (McFarlane) - at half-time did really well. We had much more of a foothold in the game.

"If anything, it looked as if there was only one team that was going to go on and win the game. We got at least a point, which is what we deserved. Would I have liked three? Yes, but looking at the group we have, that's three unbeaten.

"We started to build some momen-

um, and I didn't feel at any point we were really under pressure other than when we made errors and probably didn't make Solihull work hard enough for their opportunities.

"but I'm pleased because at half-time I got a real reaction from the players in the way they've approached the second half."

Wealdstone's recent results have comprised several defensive performances that have left Taylor gleaming.

But the first-half performance on Saturday forced the manager's hand into making some difficult decisions at the break.

"We needed to stop the opposition from exploiting gaps in our defence. We're a front-foot team, and we want to get after the opposition, and I felt to-

day, probably if I look at it, we didn't get the triggers right when we wanted to press," Taylor said when asked about the half-time changes.

"When we did press, we left gaps, and those gaps against good teams will get exploited. So what we needed to do was probably get to half-time and change the shape.

"And I just felt we looked so much more comfortable. We looked more dominant on the ball. It got us to our football much quicker, and we probably didn't want the game to end as we were in the ascendancy.

"But, there'll be a lot of teams that come here and get beat this season, as they're a good team."

Stones host York City on Saturday, then visit Woking on Tuesday (7.45pm).

Middlesex remain in thick of it

MIDDLESEX and Yorkshire head into the final three games of the Vitality County Championship Division Two season separated by just one point after a high-scoring draw at Headingley.

The promotion rivals will battle it out with leaders Sussex for two top-flight places in 2025.

Middlesex started the final day on 441-5 in their first-innings reply to Yorkshire's 601-6 declared.

They reached the follow-on target of 452 comfortably, but were bowled out for 522 in the closing stages of the morning.

Former England off-spinner Dom Bess finished with 7-179 from a marathon 70.4 overs, while in-form Ryan Higgins completed an excellent 155 off 259 balls after Sam Robson's 108. Yorkshire's second innings began shortly before lunch and they reached 150-2 from 35 overs when bad light stopped play at 4.10pm.

Yorkshire took 13 points from the round 11 fixture, Middlesex 11.

Given the placid nature of the pitch - only two batters across both sides failed to reach double figures over four days - the final day was unlikely to live long in the memory, as a crowd of only 237 indicated.

It started with no prospect of a win for either side, given both wouldn't want to risk a defeat to their closest rivals in the table.

And Middlesex captain Toby Roland-Jones said: "Getting asked to bowl first, they batted particularly well and made life tricky. I'm proud of our efforts to grind it out and endure as we did.

"Once you're in that position, bat in hand with 600 on the board, it's a case of putting together as many small wins and partnerships as possible.

"I thought we did that excellently, making sure we didn't lose wickets in clusters. I think we can be happy with our efforts as the pitch got tougher against spin.

"We rode those patches and were able to punch back as well. We're happy we managed to counter what could have been a pretty precarious situation after day two.

"They batted themselves into that position (600 on the board), and our main job is that you don't want to feel defensive in what you're doing. That was the main thing that stuck out.

"It should be a really exciting three weeks now. It's where you want to be at the end of the season, and fingers crossed we can keep playing a positive brand of cricket and come out on the right side of things." Middlesex host Gloucestershire at Lord's on Monday.