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FOOTBALL: Taylor finds positives in FA Cup exit



Alex Reid missed a great chance for Wealdstone against Wycombe

Image: Jon Taffel

Stones boss praises 'exceptional' effort

MATT Taylor refused to criticise the performance of his players after Wealdstone bowed out of the FA Cup second round with a 2-0 home defeat to Wycombe Wanderers on Saturday.

The Stones rallied for the full 90 minutes and were more than a match for their EFL opponents, who currently occupy top spot in League One.

"It was wonderful. To a man, each one of our players was exceptional today," said Taylor.

"It would be very easy to go through them all, but the reason we're all bitterly disappointed with the result was because their goalkeeper was their best player.

"That fills me with immense pride. Our players have gone out and delivered big moments, but we just didn't

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take them. I'm bitterly disappointed, but at the same time, I'm really pleased with the group.

"I thought we looked strong, I thought we looked quick, and I thought we looked athletic.

"I've got nothing but praise for my players. They're obviously distraught, but if we play like that every week in the National League, we'll get a lot more points this season."

The Stones found themselves a goal down after half an hour when Beryly Lubala's outstanding free-kick found the top corner from distance, causing Taylor's side to lose momentum

slightly after squandering an excellent opportunity to take the lead themselves just minutes prior:

"Jack's made a decision to make a tackle and got it wrong. No problem," said Taylor when asked whether the foul leading to the free kick might have taken the wind out of their sails.

"What I can't legislate for is the boy putting it in the top corner from 30 yards. It's an outstanding free-kick - Jacob had no chance.

"We go in 1-0 down and I felt if we had taken the chances that we had before that, I think the game would have had a different feel.

"You could sense the supporters were desperate to get behind us. But, in those big moments, either their goalkeeper made an outstanding save, or

we weren't at the level we needed to be with the quality."

And Taylor explained his decision to name an unchanged side from the win over Rochdale, citing a winning formula as the most rational reasoning for his choice of selection.

"When the team's winning, it's very difficult to change it. What we haven't had this season is huge continuity," he added.

"We know we've got good players on our bench. We are also acutely aware that to get into this team you have to be performing. Our players did that."

Wealdstone beat Derby County Academy 2-0 in the National League Cup on Tuesday and their FA Trophy journey this weekend as they travel to National League counterparts Aldershot Town.

Saracens pressured in 'most areas'



Mark McCall

Image: PA

SARACENS director of rugby Mark McCall admitted his side were under pressure in "most areas" at Newcastle.

The Falcons climbed off the foot of the Gallagher Premiership table with the 17-12 win, after tries from Alex Hearle and Adam Radwan.

Brett Connon opened the scoring with a penalty, but Saracens took the lead when Tobias Elliott crossed.

Newcastle instantly responded through Hearle and Radwan and put on a fantastic defensive display in the second half, which saw only Tom Willis squeeze through to score a try in the final minutes. Hugh Tizard was then shown a red card at the death for a challenge on Sammy Arnold.

McCall said: "They were much better organised than we were, they looked better coached than we were. They thoroughly deserved to win the match. "It was every area today, it started with our penalty count which was huge.

"They had a strong wind in the first half and that kept dumping us back into our 22, then it kind of unfolded from there a little bit.

"We lost some line-outs and scrums under pressure, we were under pressure in most areas. All credit to them."

Steve Diamond felt Newcastle "left 10 points" on the pitch following their hard-fought success at Kingston Park.

Friday's victory was Newcastle's fourth successive win after three Premiership Rugby Cup triumphs and came following reports the club has been put up for sale. Director of rugby Diamond said: "The elements helped us a little bit, there was a hellish wind out there first half and it completely died at half-time.

"But I think Callum (Chick) made the right decision and from minute one they gave penalty after penalty in the first 15 minutes.

"If that happens to you, you get unsettled as a team, certainly away from home. That happened to Sarries, we managed to unsettle them."