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## FOOTBALL: Eastmond given Boxing Day red card



Wealdstone suffered Boxing Day defeat at Maidenhead

Image: Jon Taffel

# Stones boss Taylor left disappointed by defeat

MATT Taylor was bitterly disappointed with the performance of his 10-man Wealdstone side in a 3-1 Boxing Day defeat at Maidenhead United.

Shawn McCoulsky struck either side of the break to put the hosts in firm control before Reece Smith secured the points, after Alex Reid had got Stones back on terms minutes after half time.

The visitors' woes were compounded on 67 minutes when Craig Eastmond was given his marching orders for a late challenge.

"In the first half we probably weren't at the level I wanted us to be at physically," Taylor told the club website.

"It was abnormal for us, because we knew this would be a really tough game. To go in 1-0 down at half-time, I wasn't overly concerned because it gave us an

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opportunity to talk to the players and make a couple of adjustments in terms of the shape.

"I asked the players for a reaction as I felt in the first half, we didn't win enough of our first contacts. We definitely didn't win enough second balls, and Maidenhead are very good at what they do.

"You have to give them credit for that, but we knew exactly what was coming. In the second half, we were a different entity from the start."

Despite going into the break 1-0 down, Wealdstone took control after the restart and were soon level.

"We get a great goal from Alex in front of our fans. We then proceed to make two really bad errors that cost us the game," said Taylor.

"We've pretty much beaten ourselves. The players are aware of why we lost.

"Even when we were down to 10 men, we moved the ball really well in their half, but we've been undone by decisions on the pitch that have cost us getting anything from this game.

"We had the momentum when we scored, and it's really disappointing to be sat here saying we've conceded three goals."

And the Stones boss felt his side might have taken all three points had they kept 11 men on the pitch.

"I felt 11 v 11, there was only one team who was going to go on and win. Based

on the second-half performance and up to the point where we conceded the second goal, we were on top and penning them in," he added.

"Our energy levels had risen, and we had a frank conversation at half-time. The players responded really, really well. It's just unfortunate we've made decisions on the pitch that have cost us.

"I can't ever sit here and question their effort, their energy. Even down to 10 men, we still looked really fit and really strong."

The National League strugglers saw their New Year's Day game with Boston United postponed after a late inspection determined the pitch to be waterlogged.

The Stones must now wait until Saturday week (January 11) to visit Altrincham.

## McCall: Saracens must react

FORMER CHAMPIONS SUFFER RECORD DEFEAT IN TOP FLIGHT



Saracens' Nick Isiekwe wins lineout ball at Bath  
Image: PA

MARK McCall says it is all about how Saracens respond after the six-time champions suffered a record Gallagher Premiership defeat.

A 68-10 loss against leaders Bath at the Recreation Ground was their heaviest in the top flight, eclipsing a 55-point reversal against Exeter in October 2023.

Saracens had flanker Toby Knight sent off after just 14 minutes and Nick Isiekwe and Theo McFarland suffer game-ending injuries, conceding 10 tries.

"When these thunderbolts come along - they have in previous seasons - it is how you respond to it which defines the rest of the season," said rugby director McCall.

"The experience is ugly and horrible, but it is how you respond to something like that which can make or break your season.

"We were disappointed with how we reacted to being down to 14 men, but there were a lot of moving parts with the injuries we got.

"There was lots of fight from the players, but that became more individual as the game wore on, which sometimes can happen, and they were able to take advantage.

"That doesn't reflect anything I've seen so far this season, and it is only a problem if you don't do something about it. We've got a big week with Bristol coming to our place, which is going to be Jamie George's 300th game for the club.

"They're a proud group of players. It is a younger group, and they're not accustomed to being on the back of something like that.

"But we've got to get back together. We've been a lot better than that in all the rest of the games this year.

"Bath were great. They are strong in all areas, and the foundation of their team is their front-row, which is outstanding. They have got Ben (Spencer) and Finn Russell at half-back, and they pulled the strings."