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FOOTBALL: All change at top following Taylor exit



Sam Ashford in action for Wealdstone at Fylde

Image: Jon Taffel

Gibson excited to get going at Wealdstone

WEALDSTONE confirmed the appointment of Welshman Neil Gibson as their new first-team manager on a two-and-a-half-year contract this week.

And his first game in charge comes against Solihull Moors - led by former Stones boss Matt Taylor - on Saturday.

Gibson boasts the UEFA Pro Licence and a wealth of experience as a manager, having won two Welsh Cups, secured four promotions, and qualified for the UEFA Europa League and UEFA Conference League on four separate occasions.

"I'm absolutely delighted to be joining Wealdstone and excited about the challenge ahead," he told the club website.

"I've had a fantastic open dialogue with Rory [Fitzgerald, club chairman]

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and feel the club and I are a perfect fit. I can't wait to get started and meet everyone - players, staff, and fans."

Club chairman Rory Fitzgerald also spoke to the club website upon hiring Gibson after seeing former head coach Taylor leave late last week to take charge of Moors.

He said: "Neil is someone we have monitored for some time and brings a wealth of experience, a track record of success, and a clear vision for the future."

"We were seeking a high-quality coach and manager who shares our values and understands the importance of the culture we have created across the

squad and football club.

"We are confident he is the right person to lead the Stones to new heights and continue building on our proud history."

Gibson will be on the touchline for this weekend's visit of Taylor's Solihull Moors, with former Wales international and Liverpool forward Lee Jones coming in as his assistant.

Interim boss Paul Hughes and first-team coach Peter Stanford have both left the club following the appointment of Gibson and his backroom staff, as the Stones continue their battle of avoiding relegation from the National League for a second successive season.

The task for the new boss is nothing short of challenging.

Already on a poor run of form, the

Stones have failed to win any of their last four league matches and suffered defeat at home to Brighton & Hove Albion U21s in the National League Cup during that period.

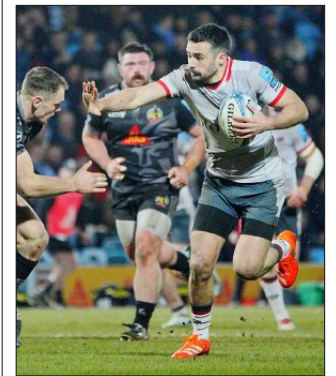
"It was a scrappy and very competitive first half, as expected given how precious the points are for both teams," said Hughes after a 2-0 defeat at AFC Fylde at the weekend.

After Ashley Boatswain had given the hosts the lead midway through the second half, Nick Haughton doubled the advantage ten minutes from time to punish an already depleted Stones.

"Overall, I felt we had more pressure, more opportunities, and slightly better moments in the game, but they took the chances they had and eventually shut the game out."

Saracens conquered by Chiefs

MCCALL PRAISES YOUNGSTERS FOR EFFORTS IN PREMIERSHIP DEFEAT



Alex Lozowski attacks Image: PA

SARACENS director of rugby Mark McCall had to field a much-weakened side in their 31-22 loss at Exeter at the weekend. The Chiefs ran in five tries at Sandy Park to claim only their second Gallagher Premiership win of the season.

Tobias Elliott touched down twice for Sarries, but Harry Wilson was sent off before Eroni Mawi's late consolation.

McCall said: "It doesn't feel like a Premiership weekend is necessary on a weekend like this, when there are international camps and players away, when it is only an 18-game season. "We said before in lots of ways the outcome was immaterial to what we wanted from the game as we knew that come the end of the Six Nations when the Premiership recommences, we were going to be in the mix anyway, with seven games to go.

"We had a lot of unavailability through international call-ups and the big casualty list we've got, and we brought a bit of a younger and inexperienced team.

"We asked them to play big and not play within themselves, and show how good they are, and not be cautious, and I thought they were wonderful.

"The energy in the team, in the first 40 minutes in particular, was absolutely outstanding. We had senior players who showed the way and younger players who played big like we asked them to, and that continued in the second half.

"And then we had that unfortunate 45 seconds or so where they scored a try from the halfway line and then another from the restart, and that's 14 points in no time at all.

"The whole energy of the ground changed and that was the game really. But in terms of what we wanted, a group of older and younger players getting stuck in, we got that."

Saracens host Ealing Trailfinders in the Premiership Cup on Saturday (3pm).