

HAVEN'T WE MET BEFORE.. CONTINUED

# Wealdstone clinch title with tremendous win at Gravesend

By COLIN POPE

Gravesend 0, Wealdstone 2

**SWEPT ALONG** on the tumultuous tide of sheer emotion from the massed ranks of their supporters, Wealdstone turned in a performance of towering ability, a virtuoso display fit for a connoisseur at Gravesend on Monday to win in glorious style the Southern League (Div. 1 South) championship and ensure Premier Division football at Lower Mead Stadium next season.

As referee Mr. M. Jermy, of Woking, blew the final whistle, everyone of the Wealdstone players were buried beneath an avalanche of fervent supporters as the pitch became a seething mass of people. Denied success for many seasons, all the heart-aches and disappointments of the past were dissolved as Wealdstone's fans — the envy of every club in the league — gave vent to their feelings.

Long after the game had ended, players were being enticed half naked out of the dressing room to take yet one more bow and then came Eddie Presland's turn. White-faced, and barely able to conceal his joy, big Eddie, manager for only three weeks after a splendid season among the action, was literally carried down the tunnel. Amateur Cup victory notwithstanding, this was perhaps Wealdstone's finest hour. This is not merely a good Stones side, but a great one. Gravesend, themselves no mean opponents, were finally bothered, and eventually bewitched, by a performance which for sheer skill will go down as one of the finest games ever seen at Stonebridge Road.

It was all so neatly summed up in the 62nd minute by Gravesend goalkeeper Brian Hughes. As John Henderson jinked his way down the left wing to unleash a right foot shot which dipped like a guided missile under the bar, Hughes sank to his knees, and beat the ground with both fists in sheer frustration at his colleagues inability to stem the tide.

To bring the matter into proper focus, one has to resort to actual facts and figures. This was Wealdstone's fifth match in 10 days, four of them away, and they came out of it with a maximum 10 points — a sequence of unparalleled consistency which may well stand the test of time.

This is not only championship form but a show of character many league clubs would be glad to possess. . . Yet this amazing side were still running at the end on Monday as if the season had just begun and one felt that they could start again on Tuesday and do it all over again.

Gravesend could, and should, have scored twice in the first 20 minutes but then ran into the twin rocks which are McCormick and Burgess. These two men, a combined 27

a better game and this was the form which took him to Japan with Middlesex Wanderers last season.

Constantly breaking from deep positions, and showing superb ball control, it was fitting that Byrne headed Wealdstone into the lead early in the second half, following a pin point cross from Godfrey. After 62 minutes the will o' the wisp Henderson feinted to cross, switched feet and hammered a right footer home to seal Gravesend's fate.

Yet Gravesend started well, with the benefit of the wind, and Woolfe skied over the bar with only MacKenzie to beat, and then Watson kicked out, with the goalkeeper beaten. Jenkins at No. 11, was causing a lot of trouble, but after this initial 20 minutes spell Wealdstone gained the initiative, never again to lose it. Indeed, in the second half came the exhibition stuff and with deft touches that only supreme confidence in one's ability can make come off, Gravesend were reduced to a side whose only hope was to contain the score.

Wealdstone officials who were in office in the early 50's, when the team of that era won the Athenian League title, believe the quality of the football played by the present team to be far superior. And, of course,

the opposition is a lot stronger. What is so impressive, though, is the work rate of the whole team, and the spirit with which they ran for each other.

As Gravesend manager Tony Sitford said after the game: "You have to beat the guys twice to get goal-side, and then, like as not, they'll be you for another go. Their character shows up as much of their skill, and when you've both those assets, you have a complete team".

### UNASSAILABLE

This victory gave Wealdstone an unassailable lead of 33 points from 33 games, and they have only lost five league games so far. Their nearest challengers were Bideford and Minehead, and as these two drew 3-3 on Monday either can now only achieve a maximum 50 points.

Bath, Bideford or Minehead should accompany Wealdstone to the Premier Division.

An interesting fact is that Wealdstone have won the title using only 16 players since the start of the season. And this includes goalkeeper Chic Brodie who was released a long time ago.

Wealdstone: MacKenzie, Kinnear, Watson, Burgess, McCormick, Godfrey, Fairclough, Fulton, Byrne, Duck, Henderson. Sub: Dyson.

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**Easter Monday**  
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versus  
**Wealdstone**  
Kick off 3 p.m.  
S.L. Div. 1 (South)  
Official Programme 3p

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**Harrow Observer's match report (by club PR Colin Pope) of the great Easter Monday 1974 at Gravesend - plus the programme cover, above. Not the best we've ever seen!**