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## FOOTBALL: Home win keeps survival hopes alive



Wealdstone's Alex Reid celebrates scoring his 13th National League goal of the season in front of the Boston United fans

Image: Jon Taffel

# Stones boss Gibson hails 'fantastic result'

WEALDSTONE strengthened their chances of National League survival with a narrow 1-0 win over relegation rivals Boston United in midweek.

Alex Reid continued his fine goalscoring form, netting in the 20th minute for his 13th league strike of the campaign.

The visitors rallied for an equaliser, but Stones held out on a crucial win with just six games left.

Manager Neil Gibson said: "It's an absolutely fantastic result for the club and everyone involved with the club. It's been a testing week for the group, the staff, and players - everybody alike. A lot of illness has been through the camp.

"I was disappointed for the players on Saturday [a 3-0 defeat at York] be-

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cause whilst we didn't deserve to take any points from the game, I thought a lot of effort, energy, and endeavour went in actually just getting players out on on the pitch.

"We regrouped, we didn't feel sorry for ourselves, and players put their hands up again and made themselves available.

"Everyone understood the importance of tonight's game. Boston have been on such a fantastic run, so it was going to be difficult for us, but I just felt the way we approached it and the way we applied ourselves, I never really felt we weren't going to win."

The result saw the Stones leapfrog Dagenham & Redbridge into 19th place, two points clear of Lewis Young's side, but Gibson revealed more concerns about the availability of his squad.

"Some of the players on the bench weren't have played too many minutes," he added.

"Other players who were on the bench have played a lot of minutes themselves or are probably just getting used to playing at this level with us and what we're about as a group.

"We will definitely need them in the next few weeks, but when the game's as tight as that was and there's so much riding on it, sometimes it's difficult to put a player on with 15 minutes to go, and all they can do then is

contribute to a mistake happening because it takes them a while to get up to the speed of the game."

Stones host Forest Green Rovers at Grosvenor Vale on Saturday in another huge fixture in their pursuit of survival.

"What we've got to try and do - is build on the confidence of that result," said Gibson.

"We know Forest Green are a strong team and at the top end of the league, but the next six games between now and the end of the season, every game's an opportunity to make sure we're a National League club for next season.

"We'll take the confidence from today and we'll march forward into Saturday."

## Saracens to rest England stars for trip

CLUB MAKE PREMIERSHIP PRIORITY OVER CHAMPIONS CUP



Angus Hall scores for Saracens  
Image: PA

SARACENS will rest their entire England contingent for Saturday's Investec Champions Cup knockout clash at Toulon after choosing to prioritise the Gallagher Premiership.

Director of rugby Mark McCall revealed Maro Itoje and Tom Willis will complete their mandatory post-Six Nations stand-down week when European action recommences for the round-of-16 fixtures. And joining them on the sidelines will be Jamie George, Ben Earl and Elliot Daly, even though the trio of England stars could be picked to face the Top 14 title challengers having not appeared in every match of the Championship.

Saracens' decision to field their strongest possible side against Leicester at Welford Road on Sunday resulted in a 29-22 victory that left them two points off the top four, boosting their play-off hopes. But McCall revealed a Champions Cup draw that would produce a quarter-final against Toulouse in the south of France as the prize for topping Toulon signalled the need to focus on the Premiership.

"We made the decision to do this halfway through the Six Nations. After we lost to Castres we got on the difficult side of the draw, so we were always going to do this and those players are all off now for the next seven to 10 days," McCall said.

"They will all miss Toulon. We don't have to do that, but we will. We think it's unwise not to rest them. It's very important they get rest.

"They have to do it in one of the three games after the Six Nations so we took the decision to prioritise the Premiership. Your hand is forced, to some extent. We're just realistic about what's possible. "A lot of the English teams have done this, it's not just us.

"We will send our best available team to Toulon. We're not going to send a pack of 18-year-olds, but we'll also give it a crack with absolutely nothing to lose."