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FOOTBALL: Spoils are shared in relegation battle



Kallum Cesay netted for Wealdstone against Maidenhead

Image: Jon Taffel

Importance of game got to us says Gibson

WEALDSTONE manager Neil Gibson admitted his side failed to rise to the occasion in a 1-1 draw with National League relegation rivals Maidenhead United on Easter Monday.

After the spoils were shared at Grosvenor Vale, the Stones find themselves two points clear of the drop and with their fate in their own hands after Dagenham & Redbridge could only muster a goalless draw at Braintree Town.

Brendan Kiernan gave the visitors an early lead before Kallum Cesay struck shortly before half-time to spare the Stones another damaging home defeat in their fight for survival.

Gibson told the club website: "The occasion and importance of the game were not lost on anyone today, and I think that potentially played a part in

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the way we started in the first 10 or 15 minutes.

"Sometimes you can speak that much about starting on the front foot, but knowing the occasion, I think that somehow, subconsciously, they were trying to feel themselves into it and remain calm.

"There's an importance about understanding what that game is about and the importance of the game and being able to match that with your emotions. But also remain calm enough to play.

"We didn't find that balance, but I also feel it took us 10-15 minutes to get Friday's game (2-0 defeat at Boston) out of our legs for whatever reason.

"Then we came into the game after that, and in the end it was a game where I felt we were wanting to really push on, get the victory and try and cement that opportunity, but because Maidenhead knew the importance of the game for them, it became really open in the second half."

After conceding early at relegation-threatened Boston United, the Stones found themselves behind after just seven minutes on Monday.

But Gibson was pleased with the way his players found a way to wrestle the momentum back before the break.

"It was really frustrating we conceded in the first couple of minutes again," he added.

"It happened. The resilience from the group in terms of the way they got

themselves through that – I thought Dante (Baptiste) made some really valuable saves at 1-0. If the second goal goes in, it's a real test of the resilience of the group at that point.

"I always felt we looked like we were going to create chances and score when we went forward as well. It was finding that balance of ensuring we tightened up where we needed to be tighter at the back in terms of certain runs needing to be tracked, certain areas of the pitch where they were causing us problems.

"Ultimately, today, we'll be disappointed by where we're at in both boxes, but we can't fault the effort from the players."

Wealdstone look to preserve their National League status for another season at Southend United on Saturday (3pm).

McCall: Sale pose tough test for Sarries

MARK McCall is expecting fellow Gallagher Premiership Rugby play-off chasers Sale Sharks to provide his Saracens side with the ultimate test on Friday (7.45pm), writes Ziad Chaudry. The Hendon-based outfit prepared for their trip to Salford Community Stadium by clinically bulldozing past Gloucester Rugby 36-14 at StoneX Stadium last weekend.

They responded fantastically in the second half by scoring 24 unanswered points after trailing 14-12 at the break. A brace of tries from Theo Dan and further scores from Argentina international Juan Martin Gonzalez and former England captain Jamie George, plus two conversions from Fergus Burke, put the match out of Gloucester's reach. Rotimi Segun and Welshman Nick Tomkins crossed for the hosts in the first half, as Gloucester's points come from converted tries by Chris Harris and Argentina international Santi Carreras. Sarries head coach McCall, 57, was delighted with the way his side responded in the second half to claim back-to-back victories after the 29-22 success at Leicester Tigers two weeks ago. "It was a probably a good sign in fact that we were able to calmly figure out at half time what we were going to do in the second half and how we needed to do it," he said.

"It was probably the support we had and what was it going to take but we were a totally different team in the second half. "That was a good sign I think, because of some of the experienced players we've responded brilliantly in that second half." While Bath Rugby are way out front in the Gallagher Premiership standings with 61 points - 15 points clear of second-placed Leicester and Bristol Bears, Sarries are fifth (44 points) while Sale currently occupy the last play-off place on the same number of points with four games remaining in the regular season.

The Manchester-based Sharks claimed a 43-29 success at seventh-placed Harlequins last weekend.

McCall added: "Sale Sharks will be the ultimate test.

"Someone told me they've only lost three Premiership matches in three years at home. They don't tend to lose at home and they obviously had a great away win at Harlequins.

"They've timed their runs extremely well at this stage of the season, like last year as well.

"They actually played really well against Toulouse (when they lost 38-15) a few weeks back in their European Champions Cup campaign.

"Overall I really expect them to win, but we've got nothing to lose." Tomorrow's match is being broadcast live on TNT Sports.