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## Middlesex draw Derby positives

### BATTERS DIG IN ON LAST DAY TO AVOID COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP DEFEAT

RYAN Higgins found his form at just the right time to save Middlesex from defeat on the final day of the Rothesay County Championship Division Two match against Derbyshire at Derby. Higgins scored 56, his first 50 of the season, sharing a seventh-wicket stand of 75 from 155 balls with Zahar Gohar who was unbeaten on 52 off 108 balls to take Middlesex to 307-7, 150 ahead, when the teams shook hands on a draw.

Max Holden (94) and Stephen Eskinazi (61) had added 169 for the second wicket only to throw their wickets away in the last over before lunch. Derbyshire's hopes lifted when the visitors slipped to 220-6 but Higgins and Gohar stood firm to deny them.

Middlesex, having seen the hosts make 472 in reply to their first innings 315, started day four 97 runs behind, needing to bat deep on a pitch that was offering turn, and Eskinazi and Holden had moments of fortune.

Eskinazi edged Blair Tickner between first and second slip to the third man boundary before Holden was given a reprieve on 46 as he swept Jack Morley hard to short mid-wicket where Tickner could only parry the ball in front of his face.

The rest of the session was largely uneventful until Middlesex inexplicably pressed the self-destruct button just before lunch.

Holden had passed 500 runs for the season and was closing on a third century in seven innings when he went for a big slog sweep at Morley and was bowled.

Perhaps he was trying to get to three figures before the interval but what followed bordered on farce as Leus du Plooy, batting with a runner, drove the ball towards the cover boundary where Harry Came's return to the bowler's end ran out Eskinazi who had raced down the pitch looking for a third run. Those dismissals opened the door for Derbyshire and a Tickner yorker struck Du Plooy's left foot in line to send him hobbling back to the pavilion.

Four runs later, Ben Geddes got an inside edge off Alex Thomson onto pad and Caleb Jewell dived at leg slip for the catch.

Chappell produced a beauty to have Jack Davies caught behind but Gohar and Higgins got to tea with Middlesex 86 ahead.

Derbyshire took the second new ball but the pair continued to steer their side towards safety until Higgins swept Thomson to deep square leg with the visitors 138 ahead.

But Gohar completed his 50 with his second six and Derbyshire called off the chase with 15 overs left.

## FOOTBALL: Stones fall into drop zone



Wealdstone in action at Southend

Image: Jon Taffel

# Gibson: We have got to fight to end

By TOM NORTON

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NEIL Gibson conceded Wealdstone didn't deserve anything from the 3-0 thumping at Southend United, which left the National League strugglers in deep relegation trouble ahead of the final day of the season on Monday.

Goals from Ben Goodliffe, Charley Kendall and Macauley Bonne put the Stones to the sword, meaning Gibson's side no longer have their fate in their own hands after Dagenham & Redbridge's 6-1 hammering of Altrincham just hours earlier.

In a brutally honest interview with the club website, a defeated Gibson struggled to comprehend the performance his side had given on the day.

"Southend were better than us in every facet of the game. Pretty much every aspect of the game they were better than us, so we got what we deserved. There's no doubt about that," he said.

"I'm more than disappointed, I'm absolutely devastated for the people involved that we've now slipped into the

relegation zone, which is something we've managed to steer ourselves away from for a long part of the last couple of months.

"We've come into it at completely the wrong time and find ourselves with it out of our hands. So, I'm angry. I'm angry about losing the game, about the level of performance, and we've all got to take collective responsibility for that performance.

"There's no way at all we can accept some of the goals we conceded, the way we played, or how poor we were at basic aspects of the game."

And the Stones manager offered some assurances to fans about the reaction he expects from his players on the final day as they host Halifax Town.

He added: "I'll always be open and honest. Now we have got to galvanise ourselves very, very quickly, because although it's out of our hands, we have to do our side of the bargain and give ourselves a fighting chance against Halifax.

"But we've got to have a real commitment from the group that they're all fighting, trying to keep Wealdstone

in the league, and we've got to ensure that is something that's really evident because if you were looking at that today (the performance), I'm not sure you would necessarily come to that conclusion."

Despite the damaging result, the voices of the travelling support were not lost on a seething Gibson.

"After getting beat 3-0, we're very lucky they stuck with us. I thought they were magnificent," he added.

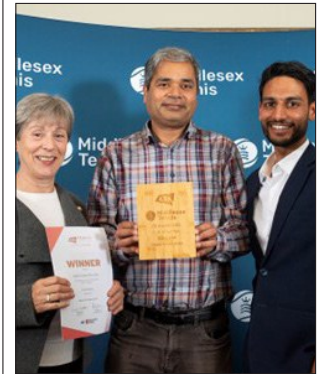
"We went over and applauded and apologised, because they've gone in large numbers to Boston last week, turned up for the home game in large numbers against Maidenhead and obviously today against Southend, and they stuck with the group because they understand the importance of what next week is.

"Even though it's out of our hands now, we're going to need them with us to try and give us a fighting chance to win our game."

The Stones face off against Halifax Town on the final day of the season, praying for a result in their favour as Dagenham visit Solihull Moors.

## Hatch End serves up a double

### AWARDS DELIGHT FOR MIDDLESEX TENNIS CLUB



Valerie Piper, Vikas Dabral and Miren Shah face the camera with the Middlesex Tennis Club of the Year Award at the Queen's Club

HATCH End Lawn Tennis Club is celebrating after being awarded Club of the Year 2025 by Middlesex Tennis as well as the LTA Excellence Award 2025 by the Lawn Tennis Association.

The awards are in recognition of a huge increase in junior players signing up, major investment in the club's infrastructure, increased engagement with the local community and a keen focus on inclusivity and diversity.

Hatch End Tennis Club has been a cornerstone of the local sports community since 1925 – celebrating its centenary this year.

With a rich history and a commitment to fostering athletic talent and community spirit, the club offers programmes for players of all ages and skill levels.

Also, it has recently received planning permission for LED lighting on three courts which will be installed this month to give the club a total of seven floodlit courts.

## Borough beaten

Harrow Borough ended the Isthmian South Central season with a 3-0 home loss to relegated Guernsey.

Behind after 15 minutes, they conceded again on the stroke of half-time and early in the second half.

Defeat left them in 14th place, with 51 points from 42 games after 14 wins, 19 losses and nine draws.