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## FOOTBALL: Club confirm ex-player as new manager



Sam Cox celebrates leading Wealdstone to safety in 2023-24 Image: Jon Taffel

# Fantastic to return to Stones says boss Cox

SAM Cox admitted it was “fantastic” to be back at Wealdstone after the club confirmed the appointment of the former player and interim boss as their new manager.

Cox, who successfully steered the club away from relegation in the final weeks of the 2023/24 National League campaign, rejoins his former employers on a permanent basis ahead of the new season.

He initially joined the club as a player in the summer of 2016, spending three years at Grosvenor Vale before taking the reins as interim head coach in 2024 after the sacking of manager David Noble.

Returning with more experience, having spent six months in charge of National League North side Oxford

By TOM NORTON  
[londoncommunity@newsquest.co.uk](mailto:londoncommunity@newsquest.co.uk)

City, the former Guyana international arrives with a greater pedigree.

“First of all. It’s fantastic to be back. I think everybody knows it’s a club, a place that has a special place in my heart and has done for a very long time now,” Cox told the club website.

“From when I first signed and to the long-lasting relationship we’ve had to my last tenure as interim manager, this club will always hold a special place in my heart, and to be back is absolutely fantastic. I’m over the moon to be back, and I can’t wait to get started.”

Just a week after former boss Neil Gibson left the club due to relocation

issues, the Stones moved swiftly to appoint Cox.

He added: “I want to say congratulations to Gibbo for the job at the back of last season, surviving (relegation). I know how much of a great feeling that is so congratulations to Gibbo, and obviously he leaves with the blessing of everyone.

“It was a real quick turnaround for me, to be honest – it came out the blue. I was living my life doing what I’m doing, having a bit of structure to my life off the back of the managerial chaos day-to-day.

“I was going back into work life, working with the academy and doing my own stuff.”

And Cox revealed how quickly the appointment came about after un-

expectedly being contacted by club chairman Rory Fitzgerald.

He said: “I got the phone call from Rory, and I thought ‘This is unusual, I haven’t spoken to Rory for a while’. He told me Gibbo would be moving on and would I be interested in the job?”

“It’s almost like the girl that you never turn down! Wealdstone’s got a special place in my heart, and straight away I said I’m interested in the job. The prospect of working with the players that are going to be here next year, the prospect of reconnecting with the fanbase which I’ve got a special connection with – it was an easy answer.”

Cox is now in the process of appointing his backroom staff ahead of Wealdstone’s 2025/26 National League campaign.

## Eskinazi is lead man in first win

CRICKET: CAPTAIN LEADS WAY WITH THE BAT IN VITALITY BLAST VICTORY



Stephen Eskinazi hits out Image: Gavin Ellis/TGS Photo

STEPHEN Eskinazi put pointless Essex to the sword as his 72 gave Middlesex their first Men’s Vitality Blast victory of the season, writes Alex Smith.

The hosts had lost six wickets in 29 balls to hinder their batting effort, although Simon Harmer’s T20 best for Essex – a brisk 41 – helped his side to a semi-respectable 156 on Sunday.

Eskinazi hammered his 23rd T20 50 in style, but Ben Geddes’ six-fuelled 30 off 11 took the visitors to victory with 15 balls to spare, and kept Essex winless in the competition after four matches.

After being asked to bat, Adam Rossington gave the Eagles a flyer with 31 off 17 balls.

With three balls left of the powerplay, Essex were on 60 and cruising but by the end of the fielding restrictions, they were two down and 29 balls later, another four batters had been and gone.

Tom Helm had Rossington splicing to cover and two balls later, Michael Pepper feathered behind down the legside. The fast bowler would also see off Shane Snater and Harmer in the final over to return four for 32, an upgrade on his back-to-back three-fors.

Harmer fell to the last ball of the innings but his 41 off 28 was invaluable to Essex reaching 156.

Eskinazi put on 97 with Kane Williamson as he passed a 35-ball half-century, but a mini-wobble, which included three wickets in nine balls, gave Essex hope. Williamson top-edged a sweep, Eskinazi mistimed a pull to the deep, Leus du Plooy was bowled by a Harmer beauty in a wicket maiden, and Davies picked out midwicket.

But Ben Geddes deposited Walter in or over the Felsted Stand three balls in a row to take Middlesex within nine runs. Ryan Higgins continued the runs of sixes at the start of the following over before a four two balls later sealed victory.