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FOOTBALL



Wealdstone lost for the first time since January 3rd as Sam Cox's side were defeated by former Stones boss Neil Gibson's Altrincham.
Image: Jon Taffel

Altrincham defeat was 'a bitter pill to take'

WEALDSTONE boss Sam Cox described the defeat to Altrincham as "a really bitter pill to take" after the Stones went down 1-0 in the National League on Tuesday night.

Cox's side had been in good form ahead of the match and were unbeaten since the 3rd of January after ending a torrid run of results over the festive period.

But Altrincham's Jimmy Knowles' 35th-minute strike was ultimately the difference between the two sides, despite Wealdstone conjuring numerous chances to take something from the game.

"It's a really bitter pill to take from the way that we played on the ball," Cox told the Stones website. "I think with the possession that we had and the opportu-

Tom Norton

nities that were created, if you probably look at the balance of the game, you'd like to think that we did enough.

"But ultimately we've had those opportunities in the final third, and we haven't worked the goalkeeper enough, and we've been punished from a set piece down the other end in a second phase. It was a really scrappy goal that we've conceded, which makes it even tougher to take."

Wealdstone's Connor McAvoy waved his arms in protest for a late penalty after being brought down inside the Altrincham box, but his appeal was disregarded by referee Callum Jones.

Speaking on the penalty shout, Cox was clearly frustrated as the chance to salvage a point at the death was waved away.

"I've seen it back. I've spoken to the referee as well, and for me it's a stone-wall penalty," said Cox. "I think that's probably why it feels so disappointing to walk away with nothing here today. It was a big moment and a big shout."

"I think it's a clear penalty. Someone like Connor McAvoy, who finds himself in the penalty box so close to goal, doesn't go down without contact. Everyone around us knew it, and I think Gibbo (Altrincham boss Neil Gibson) knew it too. The only person who hasn't seen it, unfortunately, is the referee."

"We can only control the moments that happen in the game, and if we go

back to those penalty box opportunities that we have, we've got to do more to work the goalkeeper and score one of those many chances.

"The penalty [decision not to award it] is out of our hands, but it does make it a more bitter pill to take when it's so clear."

Wealdstone host promotion-chasing York City at Grosvenor Vale on Saturday, looking to avenge some unfortunate recent events, as the Stones have taken just a point from their last two league fixtures.

"The Vale has been a fortress for us this season. It's a place we love playing at, so we're going to have to be real foot to the pedal against York," added Cox. "For me, they are one of the best, if not the best, football sides in the division."

England hope to win again

RUGBY



England in winning action

AFTER starting their 2026 Guinness Six Nations Rugby Championship campaign by emphatically banging out Wales Saracens' Jamie George is hoping England can continue their winning mentality against Scotland this Saturday (February 14, kick-off 4.40pm, live on ITV1) at Murrayfield, Edinburgh. The Red Rose ran riot on the Welsh Dragons for the second straight year. Following the 68-14 scoreline in Cardiff eleven months ago, the return fixture at Twickenham's Allianz Stadium last Saturday saw Bath's Harrow School-educated Henry Arundell score a hat-trick of tries during the hosts 48-7 domination – a result that extends England's winning run to 12 matches.

Sarries Ben Earl, Tom Roebuck and Tommy Freeman were also amongst the seven tries while George Ford kicked 14 points through the posts.

"I couldn't be more pleased about it really," said George who took over the captaincy role for this match from his fellow Sarries clubmate Maro Itoje who came on as a 50th minute substitute.

"There's just this appetite and desire for this team to be as good as we possibly can be and to get better. We felt that in how competitive training has been.

"For us then to go out and execute the way that we did is so pleasing because we looked like a team that were cohesive and given that it's the first game of the tournament I think that's pretty impressive.

"Regardless of who we were playing next, I think it's a brilliant platform for us to kick on from. We wanted to start with a bang. I thought we did that especially the way we started the game. The intensity that we played with is that looks like the sort of team that we want to be.

"It's going to be about seeing how far we can push it because we know what a big test it will be up at Murrayfield."