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‘Our second half will stay in my mind and heart for a long time’

FOOTBALL

By PA SPORT STAFF

JULIEN Stephan praised his players and the home crowd after 10-man QPR came back from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Preston at Loftus Road.

Johnny Kenny scored an early opener and then doubled North End's lead after Dennis Cirkin was sent off.

But the hosts fought back, with Kwame Poku pulling a goal back midway through the second half and Paul Smyth smashing home a 90th-minute equaliser.

Rangers head coach Stephan declared: “In the second half we didn't play with one less player, (it felt like) we played with 11 on the pitch because the fans were unbelievable.”

“Honestly, I don't remember something similar to this in my career. This second half will stay in my mind and my heart for a very long time.

“It's one point but probably more like three points in the hearts of the fans and the players.”

Stephan had “strong words” for his players at half-time, with Rangers two down and having made an appalling start against a team that began the day bottom of the Sky Bet Championship table.

The early opener came after skipper Jimmy Dunne failed to deal with a long ball and was robbed by Kenny, who raced through and slotted past goalkeeper Pierce Charles.

QPR responded with a barnstorming display after the interval and would have won but for a number of saves from visiting keeper Daniel Iversen.

“I was really disappointed with the lack of personality and character we showed in the first half, so we needed to have some strong words with the players at half-time,” said Stephan.

“It was an outstanding reaction from the players and fans in the second half.

“I'm very proud of that reac-



Queens Park Rangers manager Julien Stephan. Image: PA

tion and I want to highlight the positives because I think they did something very, very special.

“You don't see that in every game – 2-0 down at home with one less player and be able to do that in the second half. It was outstanding.

“When in 15 minutes you concede a goal and have a red card, it's a lot of bad momentum for us.”

Preston caretaker boss Jason Euell said he found himself “loving and hating” their performance even before they let the two-goal lead slip.

Euell, placed in charge follow-

ing the recent sacking of manager Paul Heckingbottom, could not have wished for a better start, but Rangers dominated the second half despite being a player short.

“Disappointing, really. I feel that when you're 2-0 up and you put yourself in that type of position, and playing against 10 men, you want to be coming out of that with more than a point,” Euell admitted.

“It's a learning curve for the players, being in this situation where we're 2-0 up against 10 men and allowing QPR to be the more dominant team for a long period.”

Coach praises Sun Devils in first Union Jack Classic

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

ARIZONA State Sun Devils head coach Kenny Dillingham praised his defensive unit during their 24-17 victory over Kansas Jayhawks in the inaugural Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium last Saturday, writes Ziad Chaudry.

Touchdowns from Reed Harris, Jaren Hamilton and Cutter Boley plus six points between the goalposts from Carson Smith was enough for the Sun Devils to complete an historic Wembley victory in front of 46,523 gridiron fans.

That victory took the Sun Devils to third place (2-1) in the 2026 Monster Energy NCAA BIG12 Football Conference – one of USA's four highest intercollegiate divisions – while Jayhawks drop to rock bottom 16th (1-2). Utah-based BYU Cougars and Texas Tech Red Raiders remain the only sides left with unbeaten 100% records after three rounds.

“Our defence as a whole played great,” Dillingham said. “I've known all camp that I think this is going to be one of the better de-

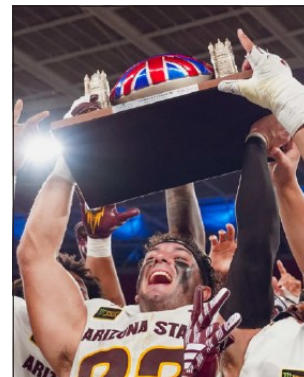


Image: Ben Lumley, Union Jack Classic/NCAA

fences we've had here. They did an unbelievable job of creating hallow ways and stopping the run early.”

Dillingham added his Sun Devils team fully enjoyed the experience of playing on the prestige hallow turf at England Football's iconic Wembley headquarters and also exploring the Capital.

The Union Jack Classic will be held again at Wembley Stadium next year.

Dramatic encounter leads to 2-1 defeat to Tamworth

FOOTBALL

WEALDSTONE suffered a 2-1 defeat away to Tamworth in a dramatic encounter that saw Connor McAvooy sent off and the hosts complete a comeback at the death.

Gary Waddock made just two changes to his starting line-up that suffered a narrow defeat to FC Halifax Town in midweek as Mason Barrett and Dan Chesters returned to the starting ranks.

After a cagey start, Wealdstone kicked into gear on the 10-minute mark as Kyle Smith launched a long throw that fell perfectly to Fela Olomola, who took his chance first time and smashed the ball into the net to give the Stones an early lead.

Minutes later, Tamworth went in search of an equaliser as Morgan Roberts' free kick from the left picked out Nathan Tshikuna, but the ex-Stones man's header looped over Dante Baptiste's crossbar.

The Wealdstone keeper was called into action in the 22nd minute, as Roberts unleashed a rocket from distance, but Baptiste remained alert and dealt with the danger comfortably.

As the clock ticked towards 30 minutes, Kyle Smith darted down the right and whipped a dangerous cross into Olomola, but the Stones striker couldn't control the ball and was flagged offside. Unfortunately, Smith was injured in the process and was replaced by Tyrelle Newton.

At the opposite end, Kieren Donnelly's pressing caught Baptiste in possession, handing Roberts a clear sight of goal, but the Lambs forward skied the ball into the stands, leaving Wealdstone ahead at the break.

The hosts came out of the interval with intent, as Ben Milnes launched a dangerous corner kick that made its way to the centre of the box, but Baptiste got a strong hand to deter the danger.

Moments later, Tamworth threatened once more, as Milnes' goal-bound free kick sparked a scramble in front of goal, with Roberts and Tshikuna both attempting to tap home, but somehow the ball was cleared off the line by the Stones defence.

Chaos ensued in the 67th minute, as Connor McAvooy lost possession and fouled Ryan Howley inside the box, conceding a penalty and receiving a red card. Tshikuna made no mistake from the spot, firing straight down the middle to level against his former club.

After the Stones were reduced to 10 men, the Lambs came knocking again as Ben Acquaye lashed a thunderous strike from the edge of the box, but Baptiste reacted sharply to keep his effort out.

Chesters went in search of a way back in front in the 82nd minute, delivering a teasing free-kick into the box, but sub Jack Cook's diving header narrowly missed the target.

With seven minutes added on, Tamworth continued to pile the pressure as McGlinchey manoeuvred into space before drifting his shot just wide of Baptiste's post.

Then in the game's dying stages, Tom McGlinchey played square to substitute Jake Hutchinson, who smashed home to snatch the hosts all three points at the death.