

APRIL 1982 — 'GOAL' SCORED BUT THE BALL HAD BURST!

Wealdstone 1-0 Basingstoke Town

WEALDSTONE	
1	Ray Goddard
2	Steve Perkins
3	Stuart Pearce
4	Dennis Byatt
5	Paul Bowgett
6	Fred Barwick
7	Paul Waites
8	Robin Wainwright
9	Alan Cordice
10	Ray Knowles
11	Roy Davies
12	Gary Churchouse

Venue	Lower Mead Stadium, Harrow, Middlesex
Date	Thursday 1st April 1982
Competition	Southern League— Southern Division
Referee	Mr V H Wood (Pattishall, Northants)
Attendance	Unknown

BASINGSTOKE TOWN	
1	Jim Greenwood
2	Steve Haysom
3	Steve Waugh
4	Wayne Hams
5	John Bailey
6	Terry Davies
7	Billy Coombs
8	Mick Doherty
9	Mark Oakley
10	Dave Eddie
11	Jim Pringle
12	George McElhinney

Match Details			
90	1-0	Davies	

It was the very start of April and Wealdstone F.C. were fighting not only to become the Southern League Southern Division champions but had also made it to the final of the League Cup. They were looking to make a swift return to the Alliance Premier League (now National League) following relegation and they still had thirteen fixtures left to complete their season. It was the third time that I'd visited Lower Mead in 1981/82 as the Stones were playing some excellent football and had some fine players. Those included the enigmatic Alan Cordice up front, creativity in midfield such as Paul Waites and solid at the back with centre-half and skipper Paul Bowgett as well as full-back Stuart Pearce (wonder what happened to him!). Let's not forget experienced goalkeeper Ray Goddard who'd been number one for Orient, Millwall and Wimbledon in the past. This was indeed a most outstanding Wealdstone team.

Hampshire visitors Basingstoke Town were in mid-table and it was expected that the Stones would win this one fairly comfortably. The final score is shown above and the time of the only goal suggests that this 'easy victory' was far from the case. The only goal by **Davies** came deep into injury time, a 20-yard shot that beat diving keeper Jim Greenwood and went into the corner of the net and denied what was almost a hard-working point for 'Stoke.

There was a great atmosphere at this similarly atmospheric ground. Greenwood, a charismatic figure, was having a fair bit of banter with the Stones fans congregated behind his goal as he and the Stoke defence continued to frustrate the home side's efforts. Tall defender John Bailey was also doing a very tight marking job on Cordice. The Basingstoke plan was very close to working but potential champions usually somehow manage to grind out a result.

Okay, so what's so special about this match then? After all, it looks like a regulation 1-0 game.

Well, something very unusual occurred. The game was in the 66th minute and the Stones won a corner which Roy Davies pumped into the box. There was a loud noise, similar to a firework going off, Bailey headed it partially clear and it fell to Ray Knowles who 'scored'. The ball, in the net, looked strange, something similar to the shape of the Rugby code of football, as its outer surface had opened and an orange bladder was sticking out! Yes, the explosive noise was the sound of the ball bursting! The referee awarded a goal. Stones fans celebrated, their players for a moment too before sheepishly opting to line-up for the restart. Meanwhile, the complete visiting team, led by Greenwood's charge, surrounded the referee. The official soon consulted with his linesman and made the correct decision to disallow the 'goal' and gave a drop ball (with a replacement of course!) in the six-yard box which Stoke survived (we were back in the days when they were competed for, and yes, even within the six-yard box!).

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The programme front cover is shown. It was a most decent effort, well printed, with good content. In his notes the club's General Manager Allen Batsford chose some wise words: "This is the time of the year when nine months' work begins to come to a peak and a whole season's effort can be won or lost." That is a far better way of stating that horrid cliché of 'the business end of the season' which is so regularly quoted today.

What was interesting was the list of goalscorers for the season as, going into this match, Alan Cordice topped it with 33. The next highest and at first surprisingly, was defender Paul Bowgett with 23, a total a striker would be well pleased to notch! However, a further investigation into this reveals that a staggering FIFTEEN of his goals came from penalties! This included three of them converted in a match against Andover just over a week before! Dennis Byatt had also netted two penalties in the season (in successive games in fact) but it is duly noted that Bowgett was back on them a couple of games later. It is fully appreciated that 'Pens' still have to be scored, of course. Match scorer Davies had not so far featured on the list!

Don't forget that this team included a young Stuart Pearce who later had a fair record of converting spot-kicks at the top level of the game and is well remembered for two penalty shoot-out takes when playing for England in the nineties, with distinctly different outcomes. Obviously, Mr Bowgett had 'pulled rank' at that time.

The writer went to Lower Mead again a couple of weeks later to watch the second leg of the Southern League Cup final. The Stones defeated Gloucester City 1-0 (and completed a 2-0 aggregate win). A glance at that updated results section of that programme reveals that no further penalties had been scored at that time. However, it was Bowgett who netted the goal, yes it was a 'pen' - "hammered high into the roof of the net" in the 40th minute.

So, Wealdstone did negotiate their gruelling end of season schedule. They won the Southern Division title, and as mentioned, were League Cup winners too. They were also victorious in a two-legged game with Midland Division champions Nuneaton Borough (and needed penalties) to win the Southern League title overall and complete a fine season. They were defeated by Hayes in the final of the Middlesex Senior Cup though.

Surely the ball never burst in another of their games in that season! It hasn't been witnessed that many times by the writer since, but when it had it never caused such a furore as on this occasion. (As an aside, the ball apparently burst in two FA Cup finals and they both involved Charlton Athletic just after World War II).

Sadly, Allen Batsford, along with some players on both teams, is no longer with us; the ground, an old fashioned classic non-league venue, is long gone too. There's a story about the ground issues which would be far better told by one of their supporters than the writer. However, Wealdstone FC have fought adversity and, most importantly, survive and, at the time of writing, are doing well, once again mixing it amongst the big guns of non-league football.

There will be Stones fans of a 'certain generation' out there who can look back on the 1981/82 season with a great deal of pride and satisfaction. They were a great team and one to recall fondly, and all thanks to the ball bursting!

