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FOOTBALL: Taylor toasts first successes as boss



Wealdstone celebrate Dom Hutchinson's goal against Crawley

Image: Jon Taffel

Stones find form with a pair of friendly wins

MATT Taylor's Wealdstone bounced back from a home defeat to former manager Stuart Maynard's Notts County with two wins from two this week.

The Stones overcame Millwall U-21s 3-2 at Grosvenor Vale in a dramatic affair on Saturday.

Chin Ocoli put the visitors ahead early as he rose highest at a set-piece to nod past Stones' keeper Jacob Adams.

But Taylor's men soon levelled via Micah Obiero's fine finish from the edge of the box.

Summer signing Todd Miller put Stones ahead after capitalising on a defensive mix-up on the hour, before a Millwall trialist hammered past Adams to level.

Trae Cook-Appiah's late deflected finish snatched victory for the home

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side to give Taylor his first win as boss, but assistant Paul Hughes said: "In the first half we were a little bit laboured.

"I didn't think we were quick enough. I expected to see a little more personality out there, as we're quite big on that.

"We did the right things, but I think we played very safe. We need to be a bit braver on the ball and play with more conviction, with a bit more ball speed.

"We told them that at half-time, and they did that. In the second half, we were much braver and pushed our full-backs on high. We caused more problems and created more opportunities and quite rightly won the game."

On Tuesday, Taylor secured his second win in charge as Stones overcame Crawley Town by a single goal.

Dom Hutchinson's second-half strike proved decisive as Taylor decided to experiment with his squad.

The visitors created the first chance as Ade Adeyemo dragged a shot wide after 12 minutes.

Former Red Sam Ashford was put through on goal, but an excellent stop by the onrushing Joe Wallacot in the Crawley goal denied Stones the lead with 26 minutes played.

The second half saw several chances for both sides, but Taylor's men nicked it late on through Hutchinson's clinical finish.

"I thought it was a good game. Crawley are a really good team, so for us to

be able to keep a clean sheet, I thought was really important," Taylor told the club website.

"The players worked very hard. We do a lot of work on things without the ball, and tonight they were excellent in terms of the way they pressed with a real intensity.

"When I look at the game as a whole, to look at the chances they created and the lack they created was down to the organisation of the team, but also down to the fact the players worked extremely hard.

"I think we have to use that extra day of training to our advantage, and we've been doing that, and I think the players looked strong physically."

Wealdstone's next pre-season fixture sees MK Dons visit on Saturday (3pm).

Saracens to start at Gloucester

GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP FIXTURES FOR 2024-25 REVEALED

SARACENS will begin life without departed England trio Owen Farrell, Billy and Mako Vunipola with a trip to Gloucester on September 21.

Gallagher Premiership champions Northampton will kick off the new domestic campaign against Bath in a repeat of last season's Twickenham final.

Northampton won their first Premiership title for 10 years when they beat Bath 25-21 in June.

Scrum-half Alex Mitchell's try seven minutes from time saw Saints home, with Bath playing almost an hour of the final with 14 players after prop Beno Obano was sent off.

Bath have also been confirmed as Bristol's opponents for the first Premiership game to be played at Cardiff's Principality Stadium on May 10 next year.

Northampton will head to the Recreation Ground for the opening night on Friday September 20, when Newcastle are also in action against Kingston Park visitors Bristol. Exeter entertain Leicester the next day, while Harlequins head to Sale Sharks on September 22.

Saracens return to Tottenham Hotspur Stadium for a fourth successive season to host Harlequins in March, with Quins staging games at Twickenham against Leicester in December and Gloucester five months later.

The first of two derby weekends takes place on October 11-13 with Newcastle facing Sale, Exeter hosting Bristol, Bath visiting Gloucester, Leicester entertaining Northampton and Saracens travelling to Quins.

Return fixtures are in March as the Premiership stages two rounds of derbies for the first time.

Every Premiership match will be broadcast live by TNT Sports and discovery+ for the first time, with the final on June 14 at Twickenham.

The final has been brought forward a week as part of a deal announced late last year between the Premiership and British and Irish Lions.

It means Premiership players involved with the Lions' tour to Australia will be able to take a full part in early stages of preparation for the visit Down Under. In 2017 and 2021, there were clashes between the English league's domestic showpiece and initial Lions camps. When the Lions faced 2021 warm-up opponents Japan in Edinburgh it took place on the same day as the Premiership final.

The 2025 Lions opening fixture is against Argentina in Dublin on June 20 before heading to Australia, where a three-Test trip begins in Perth eight days later when they tackle Western Force.