

SPORT

Read the latest sports news at
harrowtimes.co.uk/sport

FOOTBALL: First National League win secured



Henry Sandat celebrates scoring Wealdstone's winner on Monday

Image: Jon Taffel

Stones boss Taylor is delighted with success

WEALDSTONE head coach Matt Taylor backed his players to take momentum in their stride as the Stones overcame AFC Fylde 1-0 at Grosvenor Vale on Bank Holiday Monday, just 48 hours after late heartbreak in the 1-1 draw at Hartlepool.

Harry Sandat's first-half strike was enough to give Taylor his first competitive win as boss, with an outstanding second-half defensive effort proving pivotal.

"The performance level again was really good. We dominated the second game of football we've had in three days," Taylor said.

"We were brilliant in the way we defended. We were excellent until the final moment in the box where I should be stood here saying to you we won the

By TOM NORTON
londoncommunity@newsquest.co.uk

game three or four nil.

"But, the defence are the reason we've won. They were brilliant. We had to make some changes. Enzo (Boldewijn) changes position and was outstanding. Cooky [Jack Cook] and Adrian [Mariappa] also, but the players have got what their performances deserved and that's three points.

"I'm stood here with four points out of the last three days. I'd have taken that. I've said to the players our mindset had to be that we want to go into every game and feel we can win it.

"We set the team up well. We had to make changes to freshen it up - as did

they. I'm sure every National League team would have done the same.

"But I'm pleased for the players because they've never wavered in their belief in what we've been asking them to do. Hopefully that's the first win of a few this season."

Taylor's first win saw the Stones jump above Boston United into 22nd place in the National League table after five matches, although Taylor pushed back against the idea a weight had been lifted from his shoulders after a slow start.

"Not for me, no, because our performances have been really good. From our perspective as a group of staff and a group of players, if you continually believe in trusting the process, the results will come, and that's what they've done," he added.

"Has it taken a little bit longer than we would've wanted? Yes, but I should be stood here, probably if I look at the balance of the games, with more points than we've got.

"But in football you rarely ever get what you deserve, and the players today worked extremely hard. It's a big thing for them. I think it's outrageous we've got to play two games in three days, but it's the schedule and it's the same schedule for everybody.

"I'm pleased we've got three points and I'm hopeful we've not picked up any long-term injuries."

Up next for the Stones is a trip to the Midlands to face last season's play-off finalists Solihull Moors on Saturday, who sit just three points above them. Wealdstone host York City a week later.

Itoje is new Saracens club captain

ENGLAND INTERNATIONAL 'HUMBLED AND HONOURED' TO BE GIVEN ROLE



Maro Itoje

Image: PA

SARACENS confirmed Maro Itoje as their new club captain this week.

The second-rower, one of the biggest names in rugby, will take the reins ahead of the 2024/25 season and be at the forefront as he leads the club in to a new era.

His inspirational leadership on and off the pitch will enter a new chapter having recently signed a new long-term deal at StoneX Stadium.

The global figure, known for his fierce competitiveness all around the pitch, has also grown his profile externally with the launch of The Pearl Fund which aims to transform the lives of children in Nigeria and across Africa.

The 29-year-old is closing in on the double century of appearances, with 181 to his name since bursting on to the scene in 2013.

He made his Saracens debut aged just 19 and captained a young side to LV= Cup success two years later in 2015.

Itoje is a five-time Premiership champion, three-time European champion, 2016 European Player of the Year and also a three-time World Player of the Year nominee.

His meteoric achievements - domestically and internationally - has also seen him gain 84 caps for England, featuring in two World Cups, as well as six caps for the Lions on the 2017 tour to New Zealand and 2021 trip to South Africa where he was named the Lions Player of the Series. "I am extremely humbled and honoured to be asked to captain this special club. I have been here since I was 14 and it has been an amazing journey," he said.

"I love this club and I feel we are in a very exciting place with the talent and the people here, the energy we have and the direction we are going.

"I won't be doing it alone, we have lots of leaders in this group and together we can create something really special."