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## FOOTBALL: Late loss leaves team next to bottom



Wealdstone in action against Gateshead

Image: Jon Taffel

# Injuries hurting Stones bid admits boss Taylor

WEALDSTONE boss Matt Taylor's injury concerns continued to grow as his side lost once again in the National League - 1-0 at Gateshead on Saturday.

The Stones were on course for a share of the spoils, but Jovan Malcom's late strike proved decisive for the hosts.

"I thought we started the game really well and created some fantastic opportunities," Taylor told the club website.

"We took the game to Gateshead, who are one of the top teams in our league. At half-time, it was hard for me to say anything negative to the players because we created some unbelievable chances.

"But again, I'm sitting here talking about missing chances and not winning games, so that's the disappointing thing for me."

By TOM NORTON  
londoncommunity@newsquest.co.uk

After a tough start to the campaign, the former West Ham winger has been up against it with injuries to key players.

"Let's be perfectly frank, open, and honest: we were missing Sean Adarkwa, Craig Eastmond, Jaydn Mundle-Smith, Adrian Mariappa, and Max Kretschmar. All five of those are on the team. If you take any of a team's five best players, you're going to have issues," he added.

"I want to be as open and honest with the supporters. I thank them for travelling up, they were fantastic. They'll be making the long journey home like we

are thinking 'how did we not score today?'

"The players that get opportunities to score have to take them. They were not conceding lots of goals, and that's what's hurting us."

The Stones sit second from bottom in the National League with another relegation battle on the horizon, but Taylor was adamant margins will soon balance out in his favour:

"There comes a point where I have to take accountability for that, and it's on my shoulders," he said.

"What we've got to do is solve that solution, which will be helped when players come back. We're in a tough spot, but we're not playing badly. Every team we play gets that half chance, and they take it. We have to be better.

"This isn't me hanging the players out to dry; this is me saying we've got to be better; we've all got to be better. There comes a point where the value of overhitting a cross, missing a pass, and not hitting the target means more, but I can't be disappointed in the overall performance.

"We've now lost two in five; two of those we were winning into injury time. I'm aware of the issue, and we are trying to fix it. The players have taken on the game plan really well, and they're working really hard. But the one thing no one can shy away from is that we're creating chances and not taking them."

The Stones host Gosport Borough in the FA Cup fourth qualifying round on Saturday, as Yeovil visit in the National League a week later (October 19).

## Stand-out Saracens get praise

IVAN van Zyl says Tobias Elliott and Fergus Burke have been the stand-out players in Saracens' perfect start to their 2024/25 Gallagher Premiership season, writes Ziad Chaudry.

In a week that saw England coach Steve Borthwick name Maro Itoje, Jamie George, Theo Dan, Ben Earl, Elliott Daly, Tom Willis and Alex Lozowski in a 36-player squad for a three-day training camp ahead of next month's Autumn Nations Series, the Hendon-based outfit remained top of the table with a maximum 15 points after defeating Exeter Chiefs 29-14 at StoneX Stadium. Borthwick, who made 144 appearances for Sarries, was part of the 11,000-strong crowd and saw Earl score two tries alongside George, Elliott and Burke, as Lozowski kicked two conversions. Since returning from loan spells at Old Albanian and Championship side Amphyll, 24-year-old winger Elliott has scored a try in all three games so far. And that has impressed former South African international Van Zyl, 29, who is currently deputising as captain for the injured Itoje.

"He (Elliott) was on fire. There was nothing unusual for us to see him tearing it up like that," said van Zyl.

"Even last season in training he was doing, that so it's great seeing him going out there and just doing exactly what he's capable of doing.

"Tobias is scoring some incredible tries and doing incredible things. He's very explosive and it's brilliant when you get someone in who backs himself with no hesitation and that's part of the culture we're trying to create in this team.

"Anyone who comes in, just be themselves in terms of the way they're playing and expressing themselves and he's one of the examples we're seeing."

Van Zyl also praised 24-year-old Burke, a recent signing from New Zealand Super Rugby side Christchurch-based Crusaders, and believes he has slotted into the no.10 role left by Owen Farrell, now at Paris-based Racing 92, exceptionally well.

"He (Burke) just keeps on getting better in every single game," added Van Zyl.

"He was on fire again. He leads in a different way but he just keeps on going. He doesn't stand back for anything but takes ownership which is really amazing to see."

Saracens visit Harlequins on Sunday (3pm), with their London rivals seventh with eight points from three games after losing 12-11 at sixth-placed Sale Sharks. And Van Zyl is looking forward to another massive game, adding: "We're taking it one game at a time. I'm really happy with the start but next week is going to bring out our own challenges again.

"We'll be fully focused on what we need to do to give us the best chance against Quins. It's going to be massive, they'll be coming fast at us, but we're ready for another exciting challenge."