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## FOOTBALL: National League revival gathers pace



Wealdstone's Max Kretzschmar celebrates his early goal against Rochdale

Image: Jon Taffel

# Fitness key to Stones form says boss Taylor

AN enamoured Matt Taylor pointed to the fitness of his players as the key to the club's recent turnaround in results after Wealdstone continued their National League revival with a comfortable 2-0 home win over Rochdale on Saturday.

Max Kretzschmar's well-taken finish set the Stones on their way after seven minutes, before Kallum Cesay secured the points, leaving the manager with nothing but praise for his squad.

"I'm extremely happy and very proud of the players. What they did today was they implemented another gameplan we gave them," said Taylor.

"They did it really well against one of the top teams in the league, so I stand here extremely happy with what

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the players have delivered.

"I felt we were the better team for the majority of the game. We worked on Thursday night around what it (the game) looks like out of possession. When we had the ball, it looked dangerous. We played some excellent passes.

"In the first half, we probably got the press a little bit wrong. We tweaked that at half-time, and I thought that made a big difference for us. In our big moments, if you look at the first goal, it's an excellent team goal.

"Max Kretzschmar is arriving and doing what he does best - scoring goals. It was a brilliant finish. We spoke at

half-time about their high line and exposing that. We did that from a deep runner from midfield."

The Stones recent form has seen them move out of the relegation places, with four wins from their last five in all competitions, and Taylor stressed that fitness and availability have been key components to their upturn in fortunes.

"Performances at the start of the season were good, but we weren't at the level, physically, that we are now," he added.

"Everybody we play against can't believe we're not full-time because of the amount of energy we've got in the team. We're going to have to continue with that. It's nice to be out of the relegation zone. We're aware now we need

to put some good form in, in terms of the league.

"But it's important for the players to feel some enjoyment from that win, because we've had a lot of disappointment this season. Today we were well worthy of three points, and we've beaten a very good team, and I think we've beaten them convincingly."

Early season concerns seem to have eased in recent weeks, allowing the Stones to play with more freedom in the final third.

Taylor will hope his side can continue their good run with a trip to Eastleigh on Saturday, before hosting Tamworth just three days later.

Stones have also been handed a trip to Aldershot in the FA Trophy on December 7.

## 'We're just as frustrated as the fans'

CAPTAIN GEORGE ADMITS LATEST ENGLAND LOSS WAS A BLOW



Jamie George is tackled

Image: PA

SARACENS' Jamie George says he shares the frustrations of England fans who saw a demoralising third straight Autumn Nations Series defeat at Twickenham on Saturday, writes Ziad Chaudry. After falling short to New Zealand and Australia it was yet another scenario of missed opportunities as England pushed current world champions South Africa as far as they could in a 29-20 defeat.

Ollie Sleightholme and Sam Underhill tries were converted by fly-half Marcus Smith, 25, who added two penalties. But the Springboks came from behind to win thanks to tries from Cheslin Kolbe (2), Grant Williams and Pieter-Steph du Toit and nine points from Mannie Libbok and Handre Pollard.

England's losing streak now stretches to five games with their last victory in June against Japan (52-17) who they host on Sunday in their last Autumn Nations Series match.

Captain George, who played alongside clubmates Maro Itoje, Ben Earl and Nick Isiekwe on Saturday, has vowed the whole squad are determined to get things right as the Cherry Blossoms, coached by former England head coach and ex-Saracens technical advisor Eddie Jones, visit.

"We are as frustrated as everyone else," said the 34-year-old hooker. "It's important for us players to take responsibility over the last three performances.

"When you look at the positions we put ourselves in across all three games including this one, in terms of the plan put out there, when we play to the plan I think we are a very, very dangerous team. "When we stray away from that, we allow teams opportunities and I think that's what happened. So we will be holding our hands up, looking at ourselves and making sure we find the fixes so we're ready to go against Japan."