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FOOTBALL: National League fixtures announced



Wealdstone celebrate against FC Halifax Town in May and face a trip there on second weekend of new season

Image: Jon Taffel

Stones handed a home start as Truro pay visit

WEALDSTONE will begin the 2025-26 National League campaign against Truro City at Grosvenor Vale on August 9.

The official fixtures were released on Wednesday and handed Sam Cox's men a home start, before a first away-day to FC Halifax Town a week later.

After a midweek clash at Woking (August 19), Stones welcome Carlisle United on the third Saturday of the season, then travel to Boston United on Bank Holiday Monday.

They entertain last season's beaten play-off finalists Southend United on September 2 and host Braintree Town on November 8, with Boreham Wood the visitors on Boxing Day.

The long trip to Carlisle is their first game of 2026 and they visit Boreham

Wood on Good Friday, before hosting Aldershot Town on Easter Monday.

The campaign ends with a trip to Southend United's Roots Hall on April 25.

Stones play their first pre-season friendly of the summer at Northwood on Saturday.

The club have announced a Fans Forum with new manager Cox on Tuesday, August 5 (7.30pm).

It will take place in the main hall at Grosvenor Vale, with members of the board of directors also in attendance to answer any questions about the club.

It is an in-person event and will not be live-streamed.

■ Barnet continued preparations for life in League Two as a Crystal Palace XI beat them 3-1 in a pre-season friend-

ly at the Hive on Tuesday evening.

After a 2-2 draw with Hemel Hempstead on Saturday, Dean Brennan's side fell behind before the 30-minute mark when the Eagles' Jerry Umolo finished well to open the scoring.

The hosts then responded almost immediately with a goal of their own after a slick passing move allowed summer addition Scott High to burst beyond the Palace midfield and feed Ollie Hawkins, who expertly slotted home to level the scores.

The Eagles began to take control soon after, though, and restored their lead through Asher Agbinone's composed finish.

Despite creating some decent chances of their own, Barnet failed to hold out until half-time and conceded a late

penalty, with Agbinone stepping up to make it 3-1.

An onslaught throughout the late stages of the second half might have seen the Bees snatch something from the match, but their efforts were in vain as the Eagles left north London with a deserved win.

In an otherwise quiet week, Barnet confirmed the departure of Jermaine Francis, who has left to join National League side Hartlepool United in a permanent deal.

The winger spent most of the 2024/25 campaign on loan at Braintree Town, helping them avoid relegation in their first season back in the fifth tier with eight goals from 29 appearances.

Barnet host Leyton Orient on July 19 (1pm).

Middlesex left short in Blast clash

ESKINAZI'S BATTING EXPLOITS PROVE IN VAIN IN DEFEAT

D'ARCY Short raised a thrilling half-century as resurgent Gloucestershire beat Middlesex by nine runs.

The left-hander clubbed a breathtaking 83 from 48 balls, with eight fours and five sixes, and shared 100 and 52 with Miles Hammond and Cameron Bancroft for the first and second wickets respectively to propel the hosts to 204-5. Hammond weighed in with a hard-hitting 48 from 33 balls, as Bancroft made 30 not out from 19, and Ben Charlesworth smashed a nine-ball 22. Middlesex spinner Zafar Gohar took 3-54 and Stephen Eskinazi made a game of it, hitting a superb 75 from 41 balls, with eight fours and three sixes in a high-octane opening stand of 87 in 7.5 overs with Kane Williamson (34).

But Gloucestershire's bowlers held their nerve, Josh Shaw (3-48) claiming the crucial wicket of Eskinazi as the visitors came up short on 195-7 in an entertaining South Group contest. Interim first-team coach Dane Vilas said: "The way we batted and got into that chase was amazing to see. We were all happy in the dugout and confident we could win it with five overs to go.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't quite get it over the line. Maybe if we'd had a Kane Williamson or a Stephen Eskinazi there at the death, it might have been a different story.

"We played some great cricket and were well-placed, but lost a few too many wickets in the death overs. Gloucestershire have some quality death bowlers at the back end and they found their lengths when it really mattered.

"We had a few caught on the boundary and, had one or two of those gone for four instead, we might have got there. But that's T20 cricket - sometimes it comes down to fine margins. They bowled some smart overs at the back end and that was the difference."

Middlesex needed a fast start and Eskinazi plundered 17 runs off the second over by Shaw, as Williamson drove Payne for six in the third.

Williamson and Eskinazi mustered 12 boundaries in a powerplay that yielded an impressive 73 runs but Jack Taylor took a superb diving catch at extra cover to remove Williamson with the score 87-1 in the eighth over.

Matt Taylor removed Max Holden two overs later, but Middlesex were well-placed on 101-2 at halfway.

Graeme van Buuren had Ben Geddes held at long-on as Middlesex slipped to 123-3 and Eskinazi was pinned lbw by Shaw, with 61 needed from 32 balls.

Middlesex welcome Gloucestershire in a return meeting tomorrow (Friday, 5pm), visit Kent on Sunday (4pm) and host Surrey on Wednesday (6.15pm).