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FOOTBALL



Wealdstone's Dante Baptiste claims the ball during the 1-1 National League draw with Forest Green Rovers. Image: Jon Taffel

Wealdstone boss hails goalkeeper Baptiste

WEALDSTONE boss Sam Cox hailed the performance of Dante Baptiste as the goalkeeper pulled off a string of outstanding saves to help his side salvage a deserved point in the 1-1 home draw with National League leaders Forest Green Rovers.

The visitors, now managed by former Premier League player and TV pundit Robbie Savage, took the lead after 26 minutes when Isaac Moore planted a brilliant header past Baptiste from Jili Buyabu's cross.

Wealdstone might have been two goals down just minutes into the second half as Temi Babalola poked the ball towards goal, but Baptiste stuck out a crucial right leg to deny the Forest Green forward.

Tom Norton

Baptiste went on to make several more important stops before Micah Obiero was on hand to tap into an empty net following excellent work from Dominic Hutchinson to deliver the cross.

Speaking to the club website post-match, Cox waxed lyrical about the brilliant display of his shotstopper.

"We have to keep talking about him because he's deserving of it. On a week-to-week basis we know that we've got someone in between the sticks that when we are in trouble, he's going to get us out of the mud," said the Stones manager.

"He's done it time and time again. I've just pulled him there and told him how proud I am of him as a human being as well. He's just got to keep going the way he's going. His work rate and his mentality away from here and away from the pitch is tremendous.

"He's a top pro. He's always in the gym, does all his work right. He's got a real training mentality. He works as hard in training as he does in the games, so no wonder he's getting the results now. It's a great message for any young goalkeeper – just to wait for your time and be patient.

"This year, he's playing his best football."

The hosts were able to go toe to toe with Savage's league leaders. Forest

Green dominated the ball but were unable to break down the hosts' stern defensive unit despite their overwhelming attacking quality.

A jubilant Cox added: "We've been competitive in every fixture. I think we've only lost 2 league games here at the Vale. I think that's telling, not only the atmosphere and the environment that our fans create.

"But the boys are replicating that energy, and I think certainly we've seen against even the top 7 boys [teams] that we're competitive. Every game we've been in it, and we're scoring goals, and we're hard to break down, and we've got to take huge confidence off the back of that."

Sarries star is excited about future

RUGBY



Itoje hails England's unbeaten autumn

SARACENS' Maro Itoje was pleased with the way England have progressed during their successful Quilter Nations Series campaign, writes Ziad Chaudry.

The Red Rose defeated a resilient but feisty Argentina 27-23 at Allianz Stadium, Twickenham last Sunday to complete a four-match clean sweep of November fixtures following earlier victories over New Zealand (33-19), Fiji (38-18) and Australia (25-7).

The victory also confirms England stretched their proud unbeaten run to eleven games.

Tries from man-of-the-match Max Ojomoh, Immanuel Feyi-Waboso and Henry Slade and also 12 points from the kicking boots of George Ford saw the hosts hold on to victory despite a late fightback from Los Pumas who had Sarries flanker Juan Martin Gonzales in their starting fifteen.

While summarising the Quilter Nations Series as a whole, England captain Itoje, who played alongside fellow Saracens clubmates Ben Earl, Theo Dan and the returning Elliot Daly who recovered from a broken forearm sustained against Queensland Reds during the British Lions tour of Australia back in July, believes his team will go into next year's Guinness Six Nations in great shape.

"We've made some progress and I'm just really excited about the future," said the Camden-born 31-year-old lock.

England, who are head coached by former Saracens lock Steve Borthwick, open their 2026 Guinness Six Nations campaign against Wales at Allianz Stadium on Saturday, February 7.

In a new four-year free-to-air televised deal starting from next year, ITV will show ten games while the BBC will show five.