

## Another Hard Day for West Ladies

West of Scotland Ladies had another difficult eighty minutes as they suffered a second successive defeat and their mounting injury list continued to take its toll. Before kick-off on Sunday against Howe Harlequins at Burnbrae, no fewer than fifteen players were unavailable. Only one of last season's top six try scorers lined up against the Fifers.

The first half was totally dominated by the visitors with stand-off Phoebe Saunders outstanding. The first try, scored after only three minutes, saw the first example of the excellent support work that would characterise their performance for the first forty minutes. Hooker Lisa Croniken's break was supported by loose-head Jess Gurner before Saunders appeared to take Gurner's pass to score. Four minutes later, she was on hand to get her second try after a West clearance kick was charged down. We won't dwell on who charged it down.

Just fifteen minutes into the game, West lost co-captain Emily Irving to a head knock as fellow captain Amanda Paterson looked on, she nursing her injured ankle from last Sunday's match at Stewartry. This meant another reshuffle of the side, a line-up that had started with a number of players already playing out of position. It was hardly surprising Howe increased their lead, this time No 8 Samaanther Taganekurukuru finishing more good support play and off-loading. After twenty-five minutes, Howe secured their try bonus point, full back Kelle Nicoll timing her intrusion into the line perfectly to take the ball and sprint home from fifty metres. West were further reduced in the ranks when lock Catriona Munn was forced to retire, also with a head knock. If in doubt, sit them out. Almost immediately, the Fife side scored again, centre Emma Moreland taking possession from a ruck near the West line to score. Five tries and all had been converted by Saunders. There was still time for Howe to take their lead to forty points when they scored their best try of the game, Nicoll finishing off some more excellent support play. Saunders finally missed a kick.

The prospect of an absolute hammering was on the cards for West but the second half saw a remarkable show of resilience from the Burnbrae side. It would have been all too easy for the heads to have gone down but that was most certainly not the case. Three tries were scored but two of them were by West. Four minutes after the resumption, No 8 Louise Wilson picked up at the back of a scrum and found centre Jade Scott flying up to take the ball and register West's first points of the day. Left wing Rachael Croniken did score again for Howe before Ailsa Neilson scored a try on her debut for West to round off the match at West of Scotland Ladies 10 Howe Harlequins 45. This was a few minutes after coach Lindsey Smith had returned to the coal face, starting in the back row before moving to lock. Full back Amber Johnston was unanimously elected West's Player of the Match. On a number of occasions she was left one on one with an opponent but rarely missed a tackle. Congratulations, too, to co-captain Irving on becoming the first person to consume three pies in one sitting since the new catering programme came into being.

Next Sunday, West are at home to Biggar Ladies at two o'clock. Hopefully, we will see a few players return to the ranks to boost the playing pool.

West of Scotland Ladies: Amber Johnston; Ailsa Neilson, Jade Scott, Emily Irving, Katherine Wilson; Alexa Smith, Caitlin Reilly; Amy McHenry, Natasha Burge, Niamh Farrell Lewer; Catriona Munn, Vanessa Reid-Phelps; Rachel Morrison, Hannah Foster-Rain, Louise Wilson.  
Replacements: Alice Masson, Lindsey Smith, Louise Skilling, Emma McFarlane, Tiia Stevenson-Cook.