

## A Successful Trip

It was a somewhat surprised O B Malone who arrived at Glasgow Airport at seven o'clock on Saturday morning to find his party for the trip to Kirkwall was already almost complete. One member of the group had slept through the alarm and missed his taxi but a dutiful better half had delivered him safely before the appointed hour so all was good. For some of the younger members of the squad, it would be the first time they had boarded an aircraft sober so there was a keen sense of anticipation in the air. The LoganAir flight departed on time with only a little bump or two as we made our way up through the clouds and onwards to the Orkney Islands.

A comfortable landing at Kirkwall International and we were soon boarding our taxis into town. One member of the party bemoaned the loss of his bottle somewhere between Glasgow and Orkney. Who would have thought a glass bottle in a bag put in the hold of a small aircraft would not survive the journey? It may have been his misfortune but it did put everyone else in a very good mood. On arrival at what proved to be the excellent Ayre Hotel, we were welcomed with a late breakfast, rolls 'n' sausage and rolls 'n' bacon being the ideal preparation for the task ahead. Experienced Orcadian tourist Ross Wilson was clearly aware that the climatic conditions in the home of the Picts and the Norse required unusual levels of sustenance so at least two of everything was consumed with a cheeky wee biscuit or two in the pocket for later.

The party relaxed in the hotel lounge, some members of the party went for a walk until it was time to depart for the Pickaquooy Centre. The players headed to the dressing room to prepare for their pre-match warm-up, the rest to meet with the Orkney club officials. We received a warm welcome from a very friendly club.

West won the toss and decided to face the very strong wind (think Newton Stewart) in the first half. Orkney kicked off in conditions they were clearly used to and were soon ahead. West were caught offside in front of their posts, about fifteen metres out. The Orkney captain and stand-off, Connor Hancock, was left with a simple kick. West's Darren Allan was forced to retire temporarily for minor repairs, the start of a long afternoon for physio Jenny Goodwin, with Rory Cuthbertson moving to full back. Not the ideal start for the visitors but they regrouped and were soon ahead. Left wing Callum McCormack made a perfectly timed intrusion into the line to take Dru Nicholson's pass with Cuthbertson supporting to finish the move. Nicholson was sure with the conversion.

In what was already becoming an excellent match, Orkney took less than five minutes to regain the lead. They turned the ball over in the West 22, inside centre Chris Guthrie made the break before finding his left wing James Donohoe who scored in the corner. Only two minutes later, it was the Burnbrae side who were back in front. In what was now driving rain, West gained possession after an Orkney knock-on. They made ground and after Nicky Sutcliffe was held up just short of the home line, scrum half Jamie Carruth picked up at the back of the ruck and went over.

The action continued to entertain the good crowd that had braved the weather. It included Orkney based Westie Anna Campbell. Five minutes after Carruth's try, the home support was celebrating again. In truth, it was a score that West gifted their hosts. Some excellent defence by the visitors held up the home pack on the West line and a penalty was their reward. The clearing kick took play outside the West 22 but the resulting line-out went all wrong. The ball went through two pairs of West hands to be collected by Orkney hooker Scott Rendall. He still had some distance to travel but weak tackling saw him reach the line. Hancock missed the conversion but his side now led 13-12. Only eighteen minutes had been played. Four minutes later, it was West's turn to lead again. It was a lead they would not lose. From a line-out in the home 22, the pack drove. Hooker Dylan Dawson peeled off and when he was held up just short, skipper Scott Cochrane was on hand to touch down.

Just before the half-hour, Hancock repeated his early penalty conversion, from the same spot, for the same offence. Orkney were now just a point behind but it was as close as they would get. Right on the interval, the Burnbrae men scored again to secure their try bonus point and have the psychological boost of leading having played into the wind. It was a fine try. Good driving work by the pack from a line-out in the home 22 saw Nicholson find McCormack, again timing his run perfectly, for the winger to score. The stand-off's successful kick took the score at half-time to Orkney 16 West of Scotland 24. It had been a very entertaining game with West deserving their lead.

Despite trailing, Orkney had shown why they are such a tough side to beat, particularly at home. Within ten minutes, though, West had sealed their victory with the points heading to Burnbrae. After less than a minute of the second half they scored their fifth try of the afternoon. A loose Orkney kick was collected on halfway by West's man-of-the-match Carruth who fed full back Allan. He broke left to expose the home defence on that side. Allan drew his man before passing to Sutcliffe who had the easy task to run round behind the posts. Nicholson again converted. Their final try came after more good work from Carruth. After the home defence had repelled repeated West drives, the scrum-half's long pass to the right found Sutcliffe for his second try of the game. Nicholson gathered another two points with the conversion.

Although trailing by twenty-two points, the hosts simply would not give up. They had a period of sustained pressure met by resolute West defence before the visitors finally cleared their lines. It was just after this West lost Nicholson with a knee injury. He has been in excellent form with the boot this season, a difficult man to replace. Skipper Cochrane had a try ruled out for a forward pass before Carruth was fingertips away from an interception try. The line was open had he gathered.

It was Orkney who would finish the better after West were forced into a number of changes. With ten minutes left, Rendall again broke some weak tackling before finding scrum-half Alastair Morgan in support to score. With two minutes on the clock, they further reduced the arrears when Hancock went over after repeated drives. With ten points in it, Orkney were now just one score from a losing bonus point. West did not want that but gave them a chance by kicking long from the restart. What a finale to the game. Orkney recycled the ball time and time again. The West defence held firm, tackle after tackle. The game

finished after excellent work on the ground by Sutcliffe to recover the ball and allow Carruth to kick the ball out of the park. The referee's whistle for no side was a welcome sound.

A superb try bonus point win for the Burnbrae side. Not many sides will return from Kirkwall with five points. Great work by the full playing squad, the coaching staff and by Jenny Goodwin who had so many injuries to treat throughout the game.

No doubt some of you who didn't travel will have gone straight to the end to find what happened after the game. WHAT GOES ON TOUR, STAYS ON TOUR. A big thanks to Dog and OB for putting this all together. To the hugely welcoming Orkney club for excellent hospitality. The players must have put enough behind the bar to keep their treasurer happy for many a long day and to have the carpets cleaned. Thanks, too, to the great staff at the Ayre Hotel and LoganAir.

One last piece of advice. Do try to find out what Ross had in the curry house on Saturday night and avoid it!