

Five out of Five for West

Five league games played, the maximum twenty-five points gained. West of Scotland sit joint top of National League Division 3 with Gordonians, the Aberdeen side in top spot by virtue of a superior points difference. Saturday's victory over Strathmore saw the Burnbrae side score six tries in their 35-21 victory.

Coach Andy Douglas was forced into more changes after last week's win in Kirkwall, the most noticeable being Rory Cuthbertson moving from centre to stand-off to replace the injured Dru Nicholson. Darren Allan moved to centre with Alex Fiskien returning at full back. Gordon Ferguson was introduced on the right wing.



West got off to the best possible start. Having elected to play with the stiffish breeze, they went ahead after only five minutes. Scrum half Jamie Carruth has been in excellent form this season and it was more sharp work by him that gave his side their first try. His opposite number failed to gather the ball after a scrum on the Strathmore five metres line. The diminutive West No 9 was quick to take advantage to score.

West dominated the early stages, using the wind to good advantage to kick in behind the Strathmore backs. The closest they came to adding to their score, though, was when they knocked-on just short of their opponents' line after some excellent work by the pack. Strathmore began to come into the game, aided by repeated infringements by West. This has been a failing all season. Five penalties in succession saw Strathmore take a tap five metres from the home line. Solid defence, though, saw West turn the ball over and clear.

By the mid-point of the half, the game had become rather scrappy with both sides invariably losing a good position to either an unforced error or an infringement. Almost inevitably, the referee spoke to the West captain about his side's repeated offences, with offside clearly a problem. Strathmore had their first real scoring opportunity but stand-off Blair Butchart pushed his penalty wide of the posts from twenty-four metres. Almost immediately, West increased their lead. Strathmore attacked again on the West right with space for their runners. Callum McCormack gambled and with perfect timing intercepted to run nearly the length of the park to score. Cuthbertson's successful conversion gave his side a twelve points lead.

Any thoughts West had of a comfortable win were soon removed. On the half-hour mark, another penalty to Strathmore saw them kick to the West five metres line. From the line-out, the pack drove to the line and No 8 Dale Bell scored. Butchart further reduced the gap with his kick. It took West but two minutes to reply. From a line-out five metres out from the visitors' line, it was the West pack's turn to show their power. Carruth eventually took possession and fed open-side Donnie Morrison who registered his side's third try of the

game. It was very much an end-to-end game and Strathmore hit back again with their pack driving over from a line-out, Marc Scoular being given the credit for the try. Butchart again added the conversion. It looked like a three points lead for West at the interval but there was still time for them to move two scores ahead and secure the try bonus point. It was a fine score with good link play between backs and forwards before Darren Allan's superb long pass sent Ferguson in at the corner. Half-time saw West lead 22-14 in what had been an entertaining forty minutes of rugby.

It took the visitors only five minutes to reduce their deficit to one point. From a five metres



scrum, centre Kieran Gammie timed his run perfectly to take Hamish McWilliam-Gubbins pass to crash over. Butchart's third successful kick followed. The referee continued to penalise both sides and eventually it was the Strathmore captain who was spoken to. Fifteen minutes into the half, we saw the first yellow cards of the afternoon after some handbags near the West line. The home side's John Vasconcelos was joined in a ten minute breather by Strathmore's Scoular.

West extended their lead on the hour mark with a fine try. From a scrum on the Strathmore ten metres line, Carruth gave quick ball to Cuthbertson. The stand-off's pass missed out inside centre Sutcliffe and released Allan. He drew his opponent and with perfect timing sent in McCormack for his second try of the game. Allan was involved again as West moved further ahead three minutes later. After more good play by the backs, the centre was held up just short of the line but skipper Scott Cochrane gathered and went over. Replacement Owen Hourston added a further three points to the West total with a simple penalty goal. With seven minutes left, Strathmore's objective was a converted try to give them a losing bonus point. They had their chances. Full back Ruaridh Beaton caught a kick-ahead over the West line but Morrison did brilliantly to hold him up. In the final minute, Cochrane stole Strathmore line-out ball on the home 22. His clearing kick reached half-way, to be knocked on by Strathmore. The referee blew for No Side and West celebrated their win.

It was an exciting eighty minutes but not a classic. Too many unforced errors on both sides, too many penalties conceded. West were delighted with their five points, Strathmore were very disappointed to go home with nothing to show for their efforts. West will have to step up their performance next Saturday when they face Howe of Fife at Burnbrae. Kick-off will be at three o'clock.

West: Alex Fiske, Gordon Ferguson, Darren Allan, Nicky Sutcliffe, Callum McCormack; Rory Cuthbertson, Jamie Carruth; Stuart Murray, Jordan Mitchell, Andrew Love; Scott Cochrane (C), Connor Fleming; Fraser Smeaton, Donald Morrison, John Vasconcelos.
Replacements: Connor Drake, Gareth Craig, Callum Rutherford, Owen Hourston.