

## West Come So Close.

The much-anticipated clash of the National League Division 3 unbeaten top two sides delivered all that was expected. West of Scotland outscored Gordonians by three tries to two but it was the men from the north east who would take the league points, winning by 26-24. Frustratingly for West, they were masters of their own downfall.

After a minute's silence to remember the late, great Doddie Weir, the game kicked off in perfect overhead conditions with no wind to affect the play. A soft pitch, though, was always going to cause handling problems. The home side dominated the opening exchanges but it was the visitors who took the lead after eight minutes. West were caught offside in front of the kicker forty metres out after Gordonians first venture into the home 22. Ross Birnie's kick struck the post but fell the correct side of the crossbar.



The referee had made it clear from the first whistle he would be playing to the letter of the law. It was West who would fail to heed the early warnings. Another offside call was quickly followed by a penalty for the tackler not rolling away. Birnie, on this occasion, would be disappointed with his attempt at goal, pulling his kick wide from twenty metres. Another Gordonians penalty would lead to their first try. They elected to kick to touch, about ten metres from the West line. Loose-head Thomas Williams finished off the simple catch and drive from the line-out. Birnie converted to take his side's lead to ten points after seventeen minutes. It was imperative

West got the next score and they did. It was a try scored in similar fashion to their opponents, another catch and drive from a line-out. Dylan Dawson touched down, the hooker scoring against his former club. Stand off Rory Cuthbertson converted.

Gordonians should have extended their lead on the half hour. With a four man overlap fifteen metres from the West line, the ball going through the hands must have led to a try. They elected, though, for the long pass to left wing David Taylor. He was superbly tackled by his opposite number, Fraser Brand with West being awarded the penalty. The Aberdeen side did move further ahead after their pack drove West back at a scrum. Birnie's successful kick from the West 22 did seem to have been taken some yards from where the offence had been deemed to have taken place. In the remaining minutes of the half, West did come close to scoring. After a Gordonians knock-on on their 10m line, West outside centre Darren Allan broke before finding left wing Callum McCormack who had space in front of him. To the surprise of most present, a keen-eyed referee had spotted a West knock-on and brought

play back. Just before the half-time whistle, home full back Aaron Purewal crossed the Gordonians line but the final pass to him was clearly forward. Gordonians led 13-7 after a very even, very competitive first half.

Within twenty seconds of the restart, the visitors moved further ahead after West were penalised after being adjudged to have gone over the top at a ruck. Birnie had no problem with the kick from twenty-five metres. A superb try quickly brought West back to within one score. From a ruck ten metres from the Gordonians line, veteran Alex Fiskien, he had replaced the injured Brand, threw a long pass off his left hand to take out three defenders, finding Scott Cochrane who had an easy task to cross the line and touch down. Cuthbertson nailed an excellent conversion from near the touchline.

Ten minutes into the second half, Gordonians lost tight head Matthias Schosser to a yellow card for what the recipient said was “general silliness”. West were having their own problems with the match official, being penalised three times in three minutes. None of the awards led to points for Gordonians but they did score with what was a very poor try from the West point of view. They won a line-out on their own 22 but the ball went loose. It was picked up by Struan Robertson who drove to the West line to set up the ruck. Having learned their lesson in the first half, the visitors made full use of the overlap on this occasion, replacement Archie Duncan finishing easily. Birnie converted. Gordonians lead was now nine points but Cuthbertson’s penalty goal brought West to within a score again. The Burnbrae men immediately gifted the three points back. They knocked on from the restart and in trying to recover the ball, were penalised for holding on. Birnie was sure again from the tee.



Gordonians, having been restored to a full complement with the return of Schosser, were back down to fourteen men with Robertson receiving a “team yellow”, less than a minute after the referee had spoken to the Gordonians captain about his team’s discipline. The sides were soon level in numbers again, Dawson being afforded a ten minute rest on this occasion. The two packs continued to battle with the back divisions finding few opportunities. It was, indeed, a forward who would score the try that will live long in the memories of those present. Not surprisingly it was home skipper Cochrane who would get it. Leading as ever by example, the lock had been simply outstanding throughout. The ball found its way to him on halfway, on the left touchline. It seemed sure he would be forced into touch but he somehow found the pace and the energy to go past three covering defenders to score in the left corner. A wonderful try that deserved Cuthbertson’s brilliant conversion.

That closed the gap to two points. Any score would give West the win but Gordonians held on in the last three minutes to take the four points. It had been an enthralling match that neither side deserved to lose. All of Gordonians points came from penalties or, in the case of their second try, a West error. Plenty for the coaches to work on in training.

West's losing bonus point sees them nine points behind Gordonians in the table. They have a game in hand and have the return fixture to look forward to at the end of the season. The battle for promotion has still a long way to go. This Saturday, West are at home to Perthshire, kick-off is two o'clock.

West of Scotland: Aaron Purewal; Fraser Brand, Darren Allan, Nicky Sutcliffe, Callum McCormack; Rory Cuthbertson, Callum Rutherford; Pete Rhodes, Dylan Dawson, Andrew Love; Scott Cochrane, Gareth Craig; Dylan Matthews, Marc Zoma, John Vasconcelos.

Replacements: Stuart Murray, Connor Moran-Smith, Connor Fleming, Alex Fiskien.