

West Just Miss Out.

West of Scotland 29 Hillhead-Jordanhill 33.

West of Scotland's last minute win at Hughenden in September suggested a tight battle for league points was in prospect when Hillhead-Jordanhill made the short journey to Burnbrae on Saturday. A combination of bad weather and the festive season meant it had been five weeks since either side had played. There would be no real sign of rustiness in the players as they served up an eighty minutes that saw the result in doubt right up until the final whistle.



West kicked off on a heavy surface but in perfect overhead conditions. They dominated the opening exchanges with the pack looking powerful and the backs looking sharp. It was surprising it took them ten minutes to open the scoring. When they did it was with the simplest of tries. From a scrum fifteen metres out, in front of the posts, scrum half Jamie Carruth fed Nicky Sutcliffe. The centre must have been surprised at the ease at which he was able to cross the visitors' line. Rory Cuthbertson had a simple conversion.

This score should have given the Burnbrae men the impetus to take control but it was their opponents who were galvanized into action. Five minutes after West had gone ahead, from a line-out just inside the West 22, the Hillhead-Jordanhill pack drove to the line. The maul collapsed with the referee ruling it had been a deliberate action by the home forwards. Captain Scott Cochrane received a yellow card. It was, already, the decisive moment of the match. Three minutes later, Cochrane's second row partner Gareth Craig was forced to retire after a head knock. He was replaced by Connor Fleming. Almost immediately, the Hughenden side moved into the lead. From a scrum, the backs moved right with their man advantage creating an overlap. Left wing Callum McCormack was forced to look for the interception. This left enough space for full back Damien Genocchio to go over in the corner. There are few more impressive kickers in the division from tee or hand than stand-off Rory Harte. He converted the try with almost apparent ease from the right touchline.

Just before Cochrane returned to the fray, his side fell further behind. It was a simple "catch and drive" try from a line-out five metres from the West line. Despite the pack doing the work, it was winger Sean Black, showing a poacher's instinct, who would get the touchdown. Harte was again successful with the kick. West's luck continued to be of only the bad variety, openside Marc Zoma leaving through injury. He was replaced by debutant Tino Mudoti, the latest talent to come through the club's development programme. The youngster would play his part in a remarkable ending to the half. Before that, though, West would lose skipper Cochrane when he was adjudged guilty of a high tackle and received his

second yellow card of the match. It was a huge blow to West, the second row is a massive influence as player and as captain in every match. He left the field accompanied by Hills-Jills' Harte who had received a yellow card for what could only have been for something he said to the referee.

With just four minutes left in the half, West trailed by fourteen points. By the time the referee blew for the interval, that gap was down to just two points. Carruth showed excellent vision with a cross kick to McCormack. The wing moved inside before finding his outside centre Darren Allan on the loop, with a one-handed pass. Allan crossed the line and Cuthbertson converted. It was "game on" when, in the final move of the half, Mudoti picked up at the back of a ruck close to the visitors' line and powered over. Half-time saw Hills-Jills lead 21-19.



West must have hoped to have kept things tight at the beginning of the second half.

Instead, within five minutes they had gifted their opponents an easy try, turning over possession when under no pressure in their 22. Lock Robbie Thomson was on hand to score. Harte again converted. On the hour mark, West pulled themselves back into the contest. Full back Aaron Purewal came into the line, drew his man perfectly and set up right wing Rowland Osii to break some weak tackles to score. Cuthbertson's excellent conversion from close to the touchline reduced the gap to two points again.

West, despite being a man down, dominated the last twenty minutes but it was the Hughenden men who would get the vital score with quarter of an hour left. The impressive Harte chipped ahead before regaining possession and setting up the ruck. The ball was recycled before being moved left. With the advantage of the extra man, centre Scott Halliday had a relatively simple task to score. Harte, on this occasion, failed with his kick. Cuthbertson's penalty goal from thirty metres with eight minutes to go set up a grandstand finish. A try would give West the win. They had their chances. A knock on with an open field in front of the backs silenced the vociferous home support. With time gone, West were awarded a penalty. A good kick would give the platform for an attacking position close to the Hills-Jills 22. Right wing Graham Davidson's superb effort to pluck the ball from the air and feed Genocchio for the full back to kick to touch to end the game saw the West players sink to their knees.

It had been fine entertainment for a very good and very noisy crowd. Both sides will have felt they deserved the win, a draw would probably have been a fair result. West did have the consolation of try and losing bonus points. Two successive home defeats with a combined losing aggregate of six points. Next week West travel to Edinburgh to face Murrayfield Wanderers in the shadow of the national stadium. Their luck must change.