

## West Just Make It!

### West of Scotland 31 Orkney 30

This was a simply marvellous advert for National League rugby. Eighty minutes of attacking rugby with the result in doubt right up until the final whistle blew.

With the main pitch unplayable, as most were up and down the country, the game was moved to West's 4G artificial surface. A good crowd was present including West's second XV and members of other clubs who had seen their own fixture postponed. It was a cold day but there was no wind. Ideal conditions, in fact. West were again forced into a number of changes due to injuries. Adam Dunford made his debut at lock.



Any thoughts West had of a comfortable victory after their win in Kirkwall earlier in the season were soon forgotten as they found themselves fifteen points down after only fifteen minutes. It was an explosive start by the Orcadians, allowing the home side next to no possession. The opening try came after only four minutes. Good link play between backs and forwards saw Orkney create an overlap on the right. Hooker Scott Rendall came into the line to go through the gap to score. Connor Hancock missed the conversion but after ten minutes the stand-off slotted home a penalty from the West 10 metres line. Four minutes later, a shell-shocked home side was further behind. Scrum half William Thomson, sharp throughout, charged down an attempted West clearance kick. He was first to the ball to touch down. Hancock converted.

It was imperative West got the next score. Captain Scott Cochrane had travelled from London by train in the morning, arriving just on kick-off. He was introduced on the restart and almost immediately West were rewarded for the couple of tactical changes they had made. After good work by the forwards moving right, play was switched back to find Nicky Sutcliffe. The powerful outside centre broke a tackle to go over, Rory Cuthbertson converting. The full back would have a good afternoon from the tee.

A penalty goal from Hancock took Orkney's lead back to eleven points but five minutes from the interval, West brought themselves right back into the contest. It was a fine score from a Burnbrae perspective but Orkney would be disappointed. From a lineout on halfway, the ball went left. A long pass to left wing Callum McCormack saw him with only the full back to beat. This he did with ease. Cuthbertson's second successful conversion saw the half-time

score West of Scotland 14 Orkney 18. It had been a half of two halves. Orkney completely dominated the opening period, West on top in the second twenty. Great entertainment.

Five minutes into the second half, West went ahead for the first time. After good link play between backs and forwards, a feature of the afternoon in the play of both sides, Cuthbertson came into the line to break a tackle and score. He converted the try, an excellent kick from wide out. The visitors, though, quickly regained the lead. West knocked on in front of their own posts. From the scrum, play moved right and hooker Rendall was held up. The ball was recycled for Thomson to pick up and dive over for his second try of the game. The kick was missed.

Both sides were taking every opportunity to attack, both defences held firm. With thirteen minutes left, Cuthbertson's thirty metres penalty after Orkney were adjudged to be offside saw West's two points deficit turn to a one point lead. Orkney again regained the lead and again it was Thomson who would score to complete his hat-trick. After Orkney appeared to lose possession from a line-out, the scrum half regained the ball to dance through the West defence to score in the corner. Hancock kicked a fine goal to give Orkney a six points lead with only five minutes left.



West required a converted try. They drove and drove at the Orkney line. The visitors held firm until finally Connor Moran-Smith forced his way over under the posts. With the whole of the West back line standing free to the right screaming for the ball, it was just as well for the blindside he did score. Cuthbertson had no problem with the kick and West went ahead. They held firm in the closing minutes with only an ambitious attempt at a drop goal by Thomson the only threat. It fell well short. The referee blew for no side, the West players celebrated, their opponents sank to their knees. They had contributed so much to a simply marvellous game of rugby. Both sides then retired to the bar to join the spectators in discussing a great afternoon's entertainment. It was the very definition of club rugby.

Next Saturday, 28 January, West travel to Strathmore for what is always a difficult fixture.

West of Scotland: Rory Cuthbertson; Rowland Osii, Nicky Sutcliffe, Grady Slater, Callum McCormack; Jamie Carruth, Callum Rutherford; Stuart Murray, Dylan Dawson, Peter Rhodes; Adam Dunford, Gareth Craig;

Replacements: Andrew Love, Scott Cochrane, Donald Morrison, Mark Robertson.