

West Stay on Course

Wigtownshire Ladies 24 West of Scotland 32

A try in the final minute saw West of Scotland Ladies finally overcome Wigtownshire Ladies and secure their third victory in three games in the group stage of the National Shield. It had been a tough battle at London Road with the hosts looking just as capable of taking the points as the visitors.

The injury cloud that has hung over Burnbrae this season has not moved away, Amanda Paterson on the sidelines this week. It did give debutant Laura Grant the chance to impress from the bench. Rachael Millar and Rowan Todd returned to the wings. It was the very definition of a dreich day in Stranraer. Cold, wet but not too windy and a surface that was much better than could be expected this late in the season.

It was Wigtownshire who would dominate the early stages and move ahead through stand-off Sophie Mann after seven minutes. Mann would impress throughout but West would be disappointed with their efforts to halt her run from deep. She converted the try. West had to step up their efforts in defence to keep the gap to seven points. They did and got their reward just before the mid-point of the half, skipper Emily Irving taking advantage of the larger in-goal area to stop in time and touch the ball down. There had been some good link play between backs and forwards to create the score.

West were the more impressive side by now with breaks by Mann the only really source of danger to their line. The home forwards did carry well, though. On the half-hour, Irving repeated her earlier score to put West ahead for the first time. This would be the first of four tries in a seven minutes spell, three of them to the visitors. Hannah Foster-Rain scored a typical Hannah Foster-Rain try, breaking from halfway to outpace the defence and score under the posts, Irving making the try full value from the tee. Wigtownshire replied immediately, left wing Niamh Wilson finishing off a fine handling move in the corner. The deficit, reduced to five points, was restored to ten within two minutes, lock Louise Wilson breaking from just inside the home 22 to force her way over the line. It secured the try bonus point. That was the final score of an excellent first half with West leading 22-12. Wigtownshire probably felt the ten points gap was not a true reflection of the match to that point.

The second half began in the same fashion as the first. Wigtownshire keeping the ball, Mann scoring another solo effort try through disappointing defence. At this stage, the match could have gone either way. Both sides had chances to score, neither did in the next twenty-five minutes. A good number of locals had turned out, vociferous in their support of the home side. The next score in the match would be vital. It was West who would get it. Excellent driving play by the forwards with lock Ciera Campbell to the fore, good, quick handling by the backs with centre Jade Scott finishing off some excellent rugby. Any thoughts, though, the Burnbrae side had that the points were secured were quickly dispelled when home scrum half Carla Campbell's fine break followed by Mann's conversion

narrowed the gap to just three points with seven minutes on the clock. A score either way could win it. West were forced into defence for much of the remaining time before Todd finished off more fine work by the backs to score in the corner. West were two scores ahead as the referee announced "last play" at the restart. A Wigtownshire knock-on finished the match and the West girls celebrated. They just deserved the victory in a match Wigtownshire must have felt they could have taken. They most certainly deserved their try and losing bonus points. It was a huge win for the Burnbrae side that takes West top of their group with second-placed Broughton, five points behind, due to visit Burnbrae in two weeks time. Kick-off will be at two o'clock. There is no game next week with Scotland facing Ireland at Murrayfield in the Six Nations.

Thanks to Wigtownshire for an excellent game. They have come on leaps and bounds since the sides last met in 2018. It had been a good trip for the West girls with what was thought to be the perfect ending, an early evening red sunset. So romantic. Closer inspection revealed it was just the West hooker still angry about something.