

West Ladies off to Murrayfield

West of Scotland Ladies 38 Dundee Valkyries 15

After what has been an injury-ravaged season, resulting in a disappointing league campaign, West of Scotland Ladies have given themselves the chance to finish it on the highest of highs. Their semi-final victory over Dundee Valkyries will see them play in the National Shield Final on the biggest of stages, the international pitch at Murrayfield Stadium.

The scoreline suggests a comfortable victory for the Burnbrae side but it was anything but that. This was a very competent, very well organised Dundee team. West's ability to make their possession count was the difference between the sides. Valkyries had much the greater share of the ball in the second half but were outscored by three tries to two in that forty minutes.

With Laura Grant, so impressive in her three appearances in the group games, missing, Alex Love moved into the second row. After a fairly even opening quarter of an hour, it was Love who got the first score of the game, finishing off a good drive by the home forwards. Alexa Smith slotted an excellent conversion. West began to dominate but solid Dundee defence restricted them to that single try. Just before the half-hour mark, the visitors got their reward with a fine try by left wing Rachel Crawford after Lucy Gray's break was supported by Louise Whillans for Crawford to score in the corner.

West quickly restored the seven points gap with the try of the game. The forwards carried, the backs went left and full back Amber Johnston timed her intrusion into the line perfectly before straightening her run to find the gap in the defence. The lead was increased to twelve points right on the half-time whistle. This try was all down to the forwards. Hooker Rachel Morrison took one against the head from a Dundee scrum in their own 22. The pack drove to the line, recycling, recycling, recycling before Love drove over for her second score of the afternoon. West led by seventeen points to five at the interval after a fine half of rugby that had provided excellent entertainment for the good crowd watching on.

The home side more or less secured their trip to Murrayfield in the first fifteen minutes of the second half. West were awarded a penalty five metres from their opponents' line. Before the defence could react, stand-off Smith tapped the ball and went over. It was good, alert play by the outstanding player on the field. She added the extras. Five minutes later, the lead was increased to twenty-six points. It was replacement Hannah Foster-Rain who would be on hand to touch down after a catch and drive from a line-out five metres out. Smith again converted.

Dundee were quick to respond, showing they had not given up. This was a fine individual effort by right winger Gray. She had looked dangerous with ball in hand throughout. On this occasion, she used her pace to go down the line and touch down in the corner. The Taysiders would dominate possession for the remainder of the game but thanks to solid West defence, there were only three minutes left on the clock when they scored again. It was similar to Smith's try for West. Sian Barker took the tap to cross the line. There was still

time for West to record their sixth try of the afternoon, left wing Rowan Todd finishing off good support play from both backs and forward. Smith's fine touchline conversion was followed by the referee's whistle for no side. The reaction of the West players said it all.

West of Scotland Ladies will play Cartha Queen's Park (2nd XV) in the final of the National Shield at Murrayfield Stadium (the main stadium) on Saturday, 6 May as part of Scottish Rugby's "Silver Saturday". Kick-off is 12.30. Please do come along and support the West girls if you can.

West of Scotland Ladies: Amber Johnston; Eilidh Power, Jade Scott, Emily Irving (C), Rowan Todd; Alexa Smith, Katie Wilson; Amy McHenry, Rachel Morrison, Natasha Burge; Ciera Campbell, Alex Love; Amanda Paterson (C), Fiona Gassner, Rosie Broadhurst.
Replacements: Pamela Duffy, Ashley Blair, Louise Wilson, Holly Macdonald, Hannah Foster-Rain, Caitlin Reilly, Rachael Millar.