

## **Cartha Claymores 45 West of Scotland Ladies 35.**

West of Scotland Ladies fell to their first defeat of the season when they lost to Cartha Claymores at Dumbreck on Sunday. Injury, illness and NHS commitments restricted West to only seventeen players. With Mother Nature realising she had forgotten to click the "Summer On" switch and was now making up for it by providing a day of exceptional heat, it was a very difficult afternoon for the players on both sides. Cartha had the distinct advantage of having four on the bench but West battled them all the way. Their level of effort and commitment shone as brightly as Rachel Morrison's car. West deserved so much more than a solitary try bonus point.

West started so well as they faced a most welcoming breeze. From the kick-off, the interlinking play between backs and forwards, such a feature of their opening two games of the season, took them close to the Cartha line before Jade Scott crashed over to put the visitors ahead. From the restart, only last gasp scrambling defence by Cartha saw another excellent West attack halted a matter of yards from the home line. The Burnbrae side had dominated the opening exchanges and looked likely to extend their lead when, somewhat surprisingly, Cartha drew level through their full back, Victoria Halstvedt. This fine runner's pace would cause the West defence problems all afternoon. West went back in front when, just past the midpoint of the half, stand-off Alexa Smith finished off another fine handling move as the backs and forwards combined again. The lead lasted but five minutes as Halstvedt broke again to score under the posts. Caitlin Bell's conversion gave the home side the lead for the first time.

Despite trailing and with a number of players playing out of position, West did look the more likely side. Ash Blair, often used as an impact player from the bench, grafted hard at tight-head and would do so for the full game. Loosehead Tash Burge who, of course, last week took her career try total level with her career yellow cards received in international stadia with a capacity in excess of sixty-five thousand total, was to the fore again, repeatedly punching holes in the Cartha defence and setting up her support runners. Caitlin Reilly, born to play at half back, was putting in a great shift at openside flanker, hooker Rachel Morrison likewise at blindside. Back row Louise Wilson was partnered in the second row by tight-head prop Vanessa Reid-Phelps with the pairing showing up well in the loose and in their defensive duties. Winger Rachael Millar had quickly settled into her new role at outside centre. Ellen Forsyth on the right wing improves with every game.

The heat was beginning to take its toll with the players taking on water at every opportunity. West continued to look the sharper side with the forwards making ground every time they carried and the backs looking capable of gaining reward from the good possession. It was inside centre Scott who would move West ahead again breaking from just inside the Cartha half. It was the final score of the first half, West leading by fifteen points to twelve. The half did finish a couple of minutes early. West were in possession when play was halted with a home player lying injured. The referee decided to blow for half-time as the player was treated. Fortunately, she was able to continue immediately on the resumption.

There was a delay to the start of the second half as the referee counted the players of both sides but with the light beginning to fade, we finally got back under way. It took West just four minutes to increase their lead and secure the try bonus point. Katie Wilson did what all

good scrum-halves do, following her driving forwards to take possession and dive over. West were two scores ahead and looking good. And then it all went wrong. Five minutes after Wilson's score, Cartha scored the first of five tries in a devastating twenty-minute period. No 8 Isaure Desoindre finished off a forward drive before Sam Donnelly got her name on the scoresheet, the centre breaking some disappointing West tackling. The next try saw Halstvedt complete her hat-trick. She did appear to knock-on as she gathered a pass low to the ground, just inside her own half. The unsighted referee allowed her to continue, and her pace again took her clear of the West defence. (Ironically, only a mile away, a referee saw Rangers score a perfectly good goal but decided to disallow it.) All three tries were converted by Bell. Scott completed her own hat-trick to bring her side within eight points and briefly afford them some hope of victory but Halstvedt's fourth score of the afternoon, quickly followed by Desoindre's second, this one converted by Bell, took Cartha's lead to twenty points.

West Ladies were by no means playing their best rugby but they kept battling in the heat. It could have been so easy to give up. They did not and were rewarded with two late scores by Amber Johnston, the full back on both occasions timing her intrusion into the line perfectly. Three minutes remained but West just could not get that next score that would have given them a much deserved second bonus point. The referee's whistle for no side saw Cartha win by forty-five points to thirty-five.

It was not a great performance but in the circumstances, a most praiseworthy one. All seventeen players were exhausted by the end. A huge thanks to Amanda Paterson (enjoying a hopefully brief sabbatical from the playing side) who came along to support her teammates and found herself on physio duties for the afternoon after Bex Francis had to call off. She had a very busy seventy-eight minutes.

On the positive side, Amber did find her bag. We believe a GoFundMe account has been set up to purchase a bulk supply of AirTags for the repeatedly unlucky full-back. Contact Amber for further details. Assuming she hasn't mislaid her 'phone, she will get back to you.

Next Sunday, 10 September, West Ladies will be at home to Annan. Kick-off will be two o'clock. Please do come along and lend your support. Scotland v South Africa will be shown in the bar after the Ladies match.

West of Scotland Ladies: Amber Johnston; Tia Stevenson-Cook, Rachael Millar, Jade Scott, Ellen Forsyth; Alexa Smith, Katie Wilson; Natasha Burge, Alice Masson, Ashley Blair; Louise Wilson, Vanessa Reid-Phelps; Rachel Morrison, Caitlin Reilly, Rosie Broadhurst.  
Replacements: Rebecca Schaschke, Megan Scullion.